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• Allegiances •

THUNDERCLAN

LEADER
BERRYSTAR—Silky white tom
DEPUTY
JUNIPERWHISKER—Blue-gray she-cat with long whiskers
MEDICINE CAT
WILLOWWHISKER—Long-furred, matted ginger tabby tom
Apprentice—Cloudpaw
WARRIORS
LICHENNOSE—Pale brown tabby tom with a strikingly pink nose
STORMGAZE—Dark gray tom with big paws and a broad face
BRAMBLEFOOT—Brown tabby tom with a twisted forepaw
QUAILFLIGHT—Light brown tabby she-cat, short tail
ASTERFOOT—White-and-gray tom with big paws
Apprentice—Elmpaw
SORRELCLAW—Bouncy tortoiseshell she-cat
Apprentice—Flypaw
BUMBLEBEE—Black-and-yellow striped she-cat, chubby
THORNTAIL—Big, dark brown tabby tom with a long tail
Apprentice—Nettlepaw
ASPENSHADE—Pretty tortoiseshell she-cat
CEDARWATCHER—Old red-brown tabby tom
Apprentice—Mothpaw
ASHCLOUD—Sleek pale gray tom with darker patches
Apprentice—Sedgepaw
WEBTAIL—Silver tabby she-cat with a thin, long tail
Apprentice—Brackenpaw
APPRENTICES
CLOUDPAW—Fluffy white-and-gray patched she-cat
ELMPAW—Long-furred, large brown tabby she-cat with a heavy build
FLYPAW—Tiny black tom
NETTLEPAW—Thin black tabby she-cat with a small gait
MOTHPAW—Pretty tan tabby she-cat

SEDGEPAW—Black she-cat with big ears and long legs
BRACKENPAW—Dark ginger tabby tom with a wide gait
QUEENS
SAGETAIL—White she-cat (nursing Cedarwatcher's kits–Firekit, Berrykit, and Foxkit)
PEBBLEFUR—Gray tabby she-cat (nursing Thorntail's kits–Dewkit and Birchkit)
FENNELWHISKER—Tan tabby, former loner (nursing Seedkit, Cheerykit, and Finchkit)
ELDERS
HOLLYFIRE—Grumpy tortoiseshell she-cat
MORNINGBELLY—White she-cat with notable black spots on belly
AMBERBLAZE—Ginger tabby tom, oldest cat in Clan
ALDERTUFT—Silver tabby she-cat with curly fur and a short tail

SHADOWCLAN

LEADER
MORNINGSTAR—Golden tabby tom
DEPUTY
DUSTFUR—Brown tabby she-cat with ripped ears
MEDICINE CAT
SMUDGELEAF—Black-and-white tom
WARRIORS
CLOUD-EYES—White tom with scarred, blind eyes
PALECLOUD—Light gray she-cat with big ears and long legs
MOUSEFANG—Dark brown tabby tom
Apprentice—Redpaw
BRIARHEART—Brown tabby she-cat
BURDOCKTAIL—Brown tabby tom
Apprentice—Lakepaw
HAZELNOSE—Pretty tan tabby she-cat
Apprentice—Littlepaw
TAWNYCLAW—Ginger tabby tom with unusually long claws
SQUIRRELTAIL—Gray tom with a long, fluffy tail
Apprentice—Cloverpaw
HOLLYCLOUD—Long-furred, big dark gray tom with small ears
MUDFOOT—Long-furred brown she-cat with darker speckles, white back paw
APPRENTICES

REDPAW—Thick-furred red-brown she-cat
LAKEPAW—Blue-gray tom
LITTLEPAW—Small gray tabby tom
CLOVERPAW—Cream she-cat with long legs
QUEENS
PINESHADE—Black she-cat

WINDCLAN

LEADER
PATCHSTAR—Calico she-cat with big ears and long legs
DEPUTY
MUDCLOUD—White-and-brown tabby tom
Apprentice—Heatherpaw
MEDICINE CAT
MOSSYGAZE—Fluffy gray tabby tom with striking eyes
Apprentice—Galepaw
WARRIORS
SWEETSTORM—Pretty tortoiseshell she-cat
SHADOWSTRIPE—Black tabby tom
Apprentice—Brightpaw
SUNFANG—Grumpy golden tom
GOOSETHROAT—Lanky gray tabby she-cat
SWIFTWING—Handsome black tom
POPPYFERN—Tortoiseshell she-cat with a fluffy tail
Apprentice—Pheasantpaw
TALLFEATHER—Long-furred, sleek black-and-white tom with ripped ears and long legs
QUEENS
RAGGEDFACE—Brown tabby she-cat with a scarred face

RIVERCLAN

LEADER
RUSHSTAR—Dark brown she-cat with a long tail
DEPUTY
ACORNFUR—Small brown tabby she-cat
MEDICINE CAT
BARLEYEAR—Black tom with white patches
Apprentice—Sheeppaw
WARRIORS

DARKTAIL—Very dark gray, almost black she-cat with a thin-furred tail
Apprentice—Mudpaw
SKYLIGHT—Friendly gray-and-white tom
DAWNWHISKER—Golden tabby tom with long whiskers
Apprentice—Blackpaw
MOLESPLASH—Small brown tabby tom
Apprentice—Otterpaw
BUMBLECLAW—Big gray tabby tom
LEAFBLOSSOM–Tortoiseshell she-cat
Apprentice—Dustpaw
FOXFUR—Dark ginger tabby she-cat
FIRNOSE—Sleek brown tabby tom

CATS OUTSIDE THE CLANS

RAVEN—Glossy black she-cat
BRANCH—Tall tan tabby tom with ripped ears
SAMWISE—Black tom with big ears and long legs
STRIPE—Silver tabby she-cat with a short tail
SMUDGE—Black-and-white patched tom
FUZZY—Fluffy gray tabby tom with white paws and curled ears; a kittypet

• Prologue •

A wide, misty field stretched before him as Smudgeleaf blinked open his eyes.

Startled as to why StarClan had called him, especially in a time where they'd been so quiet, he staggered to his paws and looked around. His forelegs had already been dampened by the fog, making him weary and sway a little.

As the confused medicine cat glanced around, a misty shape stepped forward, its legs seeming to merge into the fog and its eyes filled with stars. Though its body was mainly transparent, faint stripes showed the markings of a tabby, and Smudgeleaf quickly recognized the figure; it was his deceased mentor, Flameberry.

"Why have you called for me?" Smudgeleaf asked, trying to keep his voice steady.

"Smudgeleaf, you know as well as I that the Clans haven't faced troubles for countless moons." Flameberry waved his tail in a strange way, his voice seeming to echo throughout his former apprentice's head.

"Yes, that is correct." the black-and-white tom responded, puzzled by his mentor's words. *Why would StarClan ask for me just to claim everything's fine?*

"But beware, for the thunder has enough power to destroy all the Clans." Flameberry's voice was low and eerie, his eyes becoming shadowed and the stars in them fading for a moment. Smudgeleaf felt a tingle run down his spine, eyes widening and ears pushing back in terror.

Unable to speak, he stood there, as Flameberry's spirt spun and faded away into the fog. The rest of StarClan followed, whirling around Smudgeleaf in a blur of mist and grass, until he gasped awake in his den.

Panting, he laid there, claws digging into his mossy nest. With a few deep, frantic breaths, Smudgeleaf was able to relax, though the fur along his neck still bristled. His eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness of night, glancing around his empty den as though he thought Flameberry would return.

Letting out a long sigh, he sheathed his claws and swallowed back a lump in his throat. Staring out of his den into the dark camp, Smudgeleaf flicked his tail. What did the prophecy mean, thunder had enough power to destroy the Clans?

Smudgeleaf thought for a few moments, still unsettled deeply by his dream. Flameberry had seemed panicked, as though he was rushing to tell the prophecy. In life, he hadn't ever been fast, taking his time on everything.

Thinking back to his words, Smudgeleaf suddenly came to a startling realization—what if *ThunderClan* was the thunder?

—

Apologies for the short Prologue!

• Chapter One •

In a hollow encircled by stone walls, among the shadows of early dawn, two cats sat together.

The two new warriors, Lichennose and Bramblefoot, had been holding their silent vigil after earning full names the former day. Bramblefoot was huddled up a tail-length from his brother, while Lichennose shivered at the slight chill, smelling rain in the air.

A few silent moments later, a snow-colored shape slid from the Leader's Den and started towards them. Bramblefoot seemed ready to stand, but knew he couldn't until the leader relieved him of the vigil.

"Lichennose, Bramblefoot. You may go rest." Berrystar murmured, his fur still messy from sleep. He whisked his tail as the brown tabby leapt up, limping away towards the Warriors' Den, his mangled forepaw stiff from sitting all night and slowing him down.

Lichennose glanced at Berrystar, then hurried after his brother.

The two pushed into the Warriors' Den, Bramblefoot finding a nest and collapsing in exhaustion. His paler brother flicked an ear, then found his own and curled up, tucking his tail tip under his chin.

"I promise you all that it'll rain." he mumbled, the tang of a storm still on his tongue.

"Right. Like you can control the weather." Bumblebee spat flatly, before drifting back into slumber. Her chubby frame rose and fell in a rhythmic way as the warrior tried to go back to sleep.

"StarClan's name, my nest is damper than a fish's back!" the she-cat retorted, twisting around in her moss. "That's because it'll rain." Lichennose mumbled. That seemed to hush her up, the other cat huffing in annoyance.

"Bumblebee, your like an elder..." Bramblefoot called from his nest, then passed out quietly.

I wonder when it'll storm... Lichennose questioned in his head, sweeping his tail around his side as the sun began to peek over the horizon outside the den. He yawned, before ducking his head and falling asleep.

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A sharp jab in Lichennose's shoulder awoke him.

"What is it?" he murmured, looking at whoever had prodded him. It was Asterfoot, looking at him with glistening eyes.

"Come on, we're going on a Hunting Patrol."

Lichennose muttered something then stood and followed him out of the den. Bramblefoot wasn't in his nest nor in camp. *Probably down by the lake,* the pale tabby assumed.

"It's your first patrol as a warrior, isn't it?" Asterfoot questioned, waving his tail as they approached the rest of the cats who would go with them. Ashcloud, Sorrelclaw, and Elmpaw.

Lichennose nodded, excitement suddenly tingling in his paws.

"Let's go!" Elmpaw pleaded, her tail lashing. Sorrelclaw seemed as happy as the apprentice, her hazel eyes gleaming.

"We'll be stopping by the abandoned twoleg-nest, then be hunting near our border with WindClan." Asterfoot stated calmly, leading the patrol out into the forest. Lichennose smiled at the ferns and plantlife as they padded along the path leading to the nest.

A few minutes later, they arrived.

The destroyed twoleg-nest was eerie and dark, it's wooden walls rotted away in most places. A large, tall cavity was cut from the front, with a slack of wood hanging off—it seemed like the slightest breeze would make it collapse. How could Willowwhisker and Cloudpaw come so often for herbs?

"This place stinks of loners! Their going to steal our prey!" Ashcloud exclaimed, hissing at the abandoned structure. He was right, Lichennose could also smell the scents of many strange cats.

"Ashcloud, this is a *hunting* patrol. Let the border patrols deal with unwanted visitors, we can inform Berrystar of it later." Asterfoot replied calmly, his ear flicking in annoyance. Ashcloud always seemed willing for a battle.

The gray tom grumbled an angry retort, though his voice was too quiet to be heard. Ashcloud returned to the patrol, growling to himself. Asterfoot rolled his eyes and continued on.

The patrol padded along the edge of ThunderClan territory. Lichennose peered into the dark woodland across the border—no Clans lived there, it was open land, but his paws still itched to explore it.

Eventually, they came to the Moonpool stream, and followed it down to the open part of the forest which was mainly just a field of grass, meeting the WindClan border. The silhouette of a warrior on the high moorland made Lichennose shudder, they were being watched.

"Elmpaw, you go with Ashcloud to the stream. Me and Sorrelclaw will cover the edge of the forest, and Lichennose can hunt in the grass. We'll meet up near the abandoned twoleg-nest again at sunset." Asterfoot addressed each cat with a flick of his tail. Excitement bubbled deep inside of Lichennose—he'd be hunting by himself for the first time!

Elmpaw and Ashcloud immediately hurried down to the riverbed. Sorrelclaw and Asterfoot padded back towards the trees, leaving Lichennose in the field. He purred, trotting towards a bramble bush and sniffing around it; Surely prey was hiding in the shade.

Though, to Lichennose's disappointment, the only thing he found were the stems of the brambles and some stray leaves.

Shuffling towards a cluster of ferns, he pushed his pink nose through the fronds. The scent of vole tainted the leaves, but it was

clear the creature was long-gone by now.

Lichennose huffed and continued to the next tussock of plants, a cluster of thorns. *StarClan's name, I can't imagine getting caught in that,* he thought, waving his tail and padding past the growth.

The pale brown tabby paused, a flicker of movement catching his gaze. Lichennose looked towards the spot, finding Elmpaw and Ashcloud watching a swarm of minnows as the large apprentice kept them trapped against the muddy riverbed. Ashcloud was picking them off one-by-one, Elmpaw hissing about how slow he was.

Lichennose watched them for a few more moments, before leaving the two and trotting over to a large boulder atop a low hill. He sniffed the rock's edges, mouse scent drenching it. The thought of sinking his claws into the prey made his mouth water.

After a minute of inspecting the cracks, a small creature darted out and fled for the trees. *A mouse!* Lichennose, reacting quickly, leapt over the rock and sped after it, tearing up grass in his wake.

Leaping for the mouse, he caught one of it's hind legs with his claws and dragged it closer. He then ducked his head, sinking his teeth into it's soft, warm flesh. Blood welled and tasted metallic on his tongue, before the mouse went limp in his grasp.

Rearing his head triumphantly, Lichennose stared at his catch. Sure, it was tiny, but prey was prey, even if he himself preferred robins over mice.

Picking up the mouse, Lichennose turned and hurried back to Elmpaw and Ashcloud.

The two were sitting grumpily by the river, the minnows they'd been hunting gone. "What happened?" Lichennose asked, voice muffled by the prey in his mouth.

"Elmpaw let them go!" Ashcloud spat, glaring at the apprentice. "Only because you were taking so long!" Elmpaw retorted, tail lashing and fur bristling. Lichennose could nearly see the rising

tension.

He dropped his catch, "Don't fight." he muttered. Ashcloud and Elmpaw both glared at one another, then stood and trotted separate ways. Lichennose rolled his eyes and picked up his mouse again.

The pale tabby padded back towards the boulder where he'd caught it. He hopped onto it, sitting and dropping the prey at his paws, before looking up at the sky.

The sun was starting to dip under the distant horizon, sending red and pink streaks through the sky, a brilliant orange blanketing the edges. *Sundown, better hurry back to meet the others.* Lichennose purred, imagining their faces when they saw his mouse. The young warrior grabbed his catch and ran off into the trees.

He dodged oaks, skidding around a birch and leaping a fallen ash. Gripping the mouse tighter in his jaws, Lichennose slid to a halt as he reached the abandoned twoleg-nest.

Asterfoot and Sorrelclaw were already there, the tortoiseshell having an elderly crow at her paws. Lichennose padded to them, showing off his mouse.

"It's a nice catch." Asterfoot nodded. Sorrelclaw smiled at the younger warrior, showing her agreement silently.

A few silent minutes later, the brush shuddered, Elmpaw and Ashcloud shoving through the ferns and padding towards them. Elmpaw had a fat squirrel held in her mouth, while Ashcloud looked grumpy, without a catch.

"I didn't catch anything." he snarled, glaring at the others. "That's because you were too busy yowling at that bee hive to even *notice* anything!" Elmpaw snorted with laugher, voice hard to make out through the squirrel's thick fur.

"Come on. The sun's going down, we need to get back to camp. It smells like rain." Asterfoot muttered, standing and starting down the dirt path leading back to camp. Sorrelclaw and Elmpaw ran after him, Ashcloud storming close behind. Lichennose snatched up

his mouse and hurried after.

Finally, someone thinks it'll storm! Lichennose thought, as the patrol continued down the path. They made their way to camp without speaking.

When they arrived, Asterfoot trotted towards the Leader's Den to inform Berrystar of the loner scents. Ashcloud and Sorrelclaw padded to their own den, the tortoiseshell dropping her prey on the pile on the way. Elmpaw set her squirrel in the pile as well, before sitting near her den and watching it, eagerly awaiting a cat to take it.

Lichennose looked around the camp, pausing near the entrance. Willowwhisker and Cloudpaw were sitting at their den, sorting herbs even with the apprentice crushing berries as she tried to move them. Willowwhisker looked annoyed, but was clearly trying to hide it.

Other warriors and apprentices were littered around camp, going on with their evening. Fennelwhisker watched her kits scuffle with a large oak twig, Sedgepaw and Nettlepaw tussling by the Elders' Den. Sedgepaw seemed to be winning, as always—the two play-fought every day, and the black she-cat hadn't ever lost.

Spotting his brother chatting with Quailflight, Lichennose paced towards them.

"Bramblefoot! We smelled loners, and I caught a mouse!" he exclaimed, tail waving happily. Bramblefoot looked at him, ears perking. "Yes, yes, that's excellent." he mumbled, then continued talking with Quailflight.

Lichennose felt a spark of disappointment, but pushed it down after a moment, trotting past him and leaping up onto a sun-warmed rock. He rolled over, getting comfortable then watching the camp. The air was still damp with the promise of rain.

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Aha here it is! Hope you all enjoy! I plan to have a question for

each chapter, to keep the story interactive.

QUESTION OF THE CHAPTER - Who's your favorite character so far?

• Chapter Two •

Thunder awoke Lichennose in his den.

The pale tabby gasped, eyes wide as he jumped into consciousness. The moss of his nest was stuck into his fur, from rolling around in his sleep. Looking out to the camp, he saw rain pounding the ground, turning his home into a dark blur of mist and blue streaks.

"See, Bumblebee? I was right!" he snorted, glaring at the chubby she-cat. She shifted in her nest, peering back at him angrily.

"Yeah, yeah, what do you want? Free prey?" she snarled, before flipping over again and drifting back to sleep. Lichennose huffed, biting the bits of nest from his messy fur. Hearing a shuffle from somewhere in the den, he looked up and searched for the source of the noise.

Quailflight was the only other awake warrior, grooming in her own mossy nest. She seemed to have been listening to the two, her ears perked.

"Why are you up? It can't be past sunrise..." Lichennose asked, twitching his tail as the striped tom shifted to see her better. Quailflight looked up, blinking warmly.

"Um, I was on the Dawn Patrol. Everyone else fell back asleep already..." she mumbled, after a long moment of thought. Lichennose ignored the falter in her tone as she spoke.

The pale tabby stood, arching his back in a stretch then shaking the sleep from his pelt. "What do you think your doing?" Quailflight chuckled, smiling. "I'm hungry." Lichennose glanced at her, padding out of the den, rain immediately drenching his coat.

He started towards the soaked freshkill-pile, ears pushing back against the storm. Suddenly, the sky rumbled, then lit up as a

deafening crack of lightning sounded. Lichennose yowled in shock, jumping and spinning around in the mud, racing back to his den in terror.

"You look like a drenched squirrel!" He was met by a snort of laughter, Quailflight staring at him from her dim nest. He chuckled, "You don't look much better." Then shook the water from his fur.

"That's why I was grooming." she rolled her hazel eyes, twitching an ear.

Lichennose plopped down in his nest, resting his chin on the side, facing her. "So, is the freshkill-pile soaked?" Quailflight asked, swiping her pink tongue over her pelt again.

"Mhm." he rolled onto his side, yawning. "The storm's probably gonna chase all the living prey back into their burrows, too."

"That's too bad. I was planning on hunting today." Quailflight meowed, "I guess I'll have to tomorrow, if the rain's stopped by then. I remember the last storm this loud, it was drizzling all moon, even after it ended!"

Lichennose thought back to the time she was talking about. He and his brother had only been kits. Their mother had gotten after them for trampling around in the mud and water, getting their pelts soaked. The memory made him purr.

"Yeah, me and Bramblefoot were barely two moons old then!" he exclaimed, chuckling lightly. Quailflight nodded with a smile.

"Hey, do you think those loners will cause any trouble?" she suddenly asked, ears perking. Lichennose raised his head, confused as to why she'd asked so quickly. "No, I doubt it." he responded, stretching out his forelegs.

After a few heartbeats of silence, only broken by the pounding of rain outside, the other cats around them began to stir. Cedarwatcher shifted awake, beginning to groom quietly. Asterfoot twitched his ear, Stromgaze flipping over in his own nest.

"Oh, sorry, I need to go." Quailflight hopped onto her paws, skirting

past him and hurrying out into the dim storm. Lichennose blinked, getting up and pacing after her.

As he pushed through a thin curtain of lichen into the soaked camp, he looked around through the thick rain. But, unfortunately, the light she-cat was no where in sight.

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Lichennose laid across a damp rock, eyes half-closed. The camp was busy, as always, with warriors slipping in and out, patrols returning, and apprentices play-fighting. It had stopped storming awhile before.

He was watching Fennelwhisker's kits and Dewkit wrestling in a puddle. Pebblefur was sitting a tail-length away, with Birchkit huddled in her paws, barely a scrap of fur. The young kit's sick nature made Lichennose worry. Fennelwhisker was no where to be seen.

Looking back at the kits, he realized Dewkit was loosing. Cherrykit had the smaller she pinned, with her muzzle barely above the water's surface, forcing her to gasp for breath.

"Dewkit, come here!" Pebblefur called, waving her tail. Cherrykit let her tiny denmate scamper off to her mother, before her and her littermates ran off to chase a stray oak leaf, Seedkit leading the charge.

Lichennose turned his attention away from them, watching Willowwhisker and Cloudpaw sorting herbs at the mouth of their shared den. Cloudpaw clumsily pushed a bunch of dandelion flowers into a pile of fuzzy leaves, which looked nothing like the dandelion. She then tried to move a juniper berry, crushing it into the stone with her weight.

Her matted mentor sighed angrily, so loud that Lichennose could almost hear it. Willowwhisker then growled something to his apprentice, Cloudpaw snorting in defiance. The two then continued sorting herbs, the matted tom angry and his apprentice no better.

Lichennose looked over at the camp entrance, where a Hunting Patrol was returning with their jaws laden with fresh prey.

At the back of the patrol, Quailflight stumbled, her hind legs stiff and her tail bushed up. It looked like she'd sat on a twig. Lichennose tilted his head in curiosity, watching her pace with wide strides to the Medicine Cat's Den.

Suddenly, a small shape trampled in front of him, then leapt off the rock after a butterfly. It was Sagetail's kits, with Foxkit in the lead.

They scampered after the colorful winged bug, as it flitted over a small clump of ferns. Berrykit strayed behind his siblings, while the other two attempted to catch it, failing and chasing the insect towards the Nursery.

Lichennose purred at the sight, suddenly realizing how heavy his eyelids had become. Settling his head down, he eased into sleep, his back warmed by sunlight while he lost consciousness.

• Chapter Three •

Deafening screeches battered Lichennose's ears, as he fought with a bushy-tailed ShadowClan warrior. The gray tom hissed and growled, dealing painful blows to his face.

Lichennose snarled, as his enemy pinned him against the blood-stained ground. The other members of the patrol battled around them, fighting with ShadowClan cats. The pale tabby reared his hind legs and pummeled the opponent's stomach, making him gasp and topple over.

Lichennose leapt up onto his paws, hissing fiercely. The ThunderClan warrior was suddenly beat down again, as a fluffy brown she-cat tackled him. He recognized her as Mudfoot.

Lichennose kicked her with all his strength, but it didn't falter the older warrior's stance. She raised her claws and tore at his ears, pain seeping through Lichennose's body in waves as he yowled in failing attempts to get her to jump off.

Mudfoot, seeming satisfied, paused her shredding for a moment. In that heartbeat, a tortoiseshell head-butted her shoulder, and both she-cats were sent grappling at one another. Lichennose sprang to his paws, and realized the cat who'd saved him was Aspenshade, heaving for breath as Mudfoot sliced at her muzzle.

He abandoned the two, narrowly avoiding a strike from a brown tabby, though he lost his footing and collapsed onto the hard ground. Stunned, he blinked, frantically trying to shoo the dizziness from his head.

While Lichennose lay there, the cat—whom he knew as Burdocktail—slashed at his flank, leaving burning wounds that soon swelled with fresh blood, adding to his pain. Burdocktail was shouldered aside by Stormgaze, who sliced at his cheek, both toms toppling over in a seething mass of claws and teeth.

Lichennose, numb from pain from his ears to tail-tip, staggered past them and collapsed a mouse-length from the crowd of battling cats. He drew in deep breaths, and was about to get back up when another ShadowClan warrior took advantage of his weakened state and pounced.

It was Mudfoot again, hissing furiously. She'd escaped Aspenshade. Lichennose growled, attempting to fight back but unable to, soon succumbing to her attack. The fluffy she-cat tore at his cheeks, and was about to send a killing bite to his throat when a voice rang out over the fight.

"ShadowClan, retreat! We have won this battle, retreat! Retreat!"

Mudfoot glared at Lichennose, then hopped off and started back towards her leader, who had been watching with a black-and-white tom. She growled a seething retort, but Lichennose was far too exhausted to pay mind to it. As ShadowClan headed back over the border to their territory, he laid his head on the ground and tried to rest.

Lichennose thought back to what had caused this battle. It had been four sunrises since the storm, Quailflight announcing she was expecting kits. He had been sent on a border patrol, ShadowClan attacking them.

A sharp jab in his shoulder alerted Lichennose, and at first he was terrified, thinking Mudfoot had come back. But as he glanced at the figure looming above him, he instead found Aspenshade, still gasping for breaths while coughing in-between.

Another one of his Clanmates, this time Asterfoot, appeared at her side. He had fur missing from his foreleg, and harsh scratches across his face. Aspenshade had ripped ears and a scarred shoulder.

The two helped him to his paws, supporting the injured warrior. He hung his head; it was his first battle as a warrior, and they'd lost! The pale tabby soon spotted his brother, being supported by Webtail. The rest of the patrol was beginning to gather, with the sturdier warriors helping the ones with the worst injuries. Bramblefoot's left eye had a deep gash just above it, and his twisted

forepaw was wrenched sideways.

The cats returned to camp silently, and the trek back home seemed to drag for countless seasons. Bramblefoot kept muttering about his stupid paw, the only one breaking the silence as they pushed into their camp.

ThunderClan cats immediately swarmed around them like frenzied bees, asking questions and gossiping about what'd taken place. Berrystar shouldered to the front, eyes glittering angrily. Willowwhisker trotted up beside him shortly after.

"Take them to my den." the medicine cat ordered before Berrystar could speak. At once, the patrol started towards Willowwhisker's den, as instructed.

Bramblefoot and Lichennose had the worst injuries. The rest of the patrol had mainly just bad scratches and ripped ears. Willowwhisker immediately went to fetch herbs, returning quickly with a poultice and cobwebs, hurrying over to Bramblefoot.

"I'm assuming someone tripped you." he mumbled, not breaking from his work while he dressed the paw in the poultice. The brown tabby nodded stiffly, wincing in pain as Willowwhisker sniffed it, "I'll need to shove it back into it's socket, it's dislodged as well."

"Bite this." he ordered, shoving a stick to Bramblefoot's muzzle. The tabby nodded, clasping it between his jaws as Willowhisker nipped the paw, pushing it harshly back into place. Bramblefoot immediately yelped loudly, startling everyone in the shady den.

"There, that's better." the matted medicine cat dressed it in cobwebs, then moved to another warrior, Asterfoot. Bramblefoot grumbled, setting his head on the mossy nest and letting out a loud sigh.

Willowwhisker went from cat to cat, treating injuries and continuously padding back and forth from his storage to the patients, fetching and leaving herbs until the den was musty and scattered with leaves. Golden evening light filtered into the cave as he sent the final warrior to their den, stating they could return if their wounds grew worse.

He sighed, turning and looking at Lichennose, who was still awaiting their help. "Cloudpaw, treat Lichennose." Willowwhisker ordered, "I'll watch."

Cloudpaw groaned, the fluffy she-cat trudging over to him with a lashing tail. She grabbed a bunch of cobwebs on the way, sitting at his side. The medicine cat apprentice swathed her paw in webbing, then dressed the scratches along his flank.

Lichennose winced sharply, tail bristling with pain.

"Eat this." she snarled, shoving a thin-stemmed, white, flowering plant to his muzzle. He sniffed it. *Must be a healing herb,* he thought, nibbling on the leaves before swallowing the flower.

A few moments later, he gagged, vomiting onto his nest and choking. Willowwhisker looked up from Bramblefoot, snarling and shouldering his apprentice away. "I'm sorry," he muttered, turning to fetch some actual herbs.

The medicine cat soon returned, holding a leafwrap. He sat it down, unfolding the bundle as Lichennose retched again.

"Could you please eat these?" Willowwhisker murmured, nudging some long, thin leaves to Lichennose. He weakly noddles, quickly swallowing the herbs. Both toms sat in silence for a moment, expecting the ill warrior to get sick again, but it didn't come.

Lichennose, tired, rested his head on the ground. Willowwhisker had him eat some blue berries, which helped to settle his stomach further. The ginger tabby medicine cat fetched some damp moss, cleaning up the mess then replacing Lichennose's filthy moss with fresh bedding.

Willowwhisker, without a word, then dipped back behind a rock and returned with cobwebs and sticks. Lichennose thought it was for himself, but soon realized it was for his brother as the medicine cat hurried towards Bramblefoot.

"Hold your paw still for a moment." he instructed, gently wrapping it in webbing, then securing it in place with four thin sticks. "There,

that'll keep it still while it heals. Tomorrow I'll add a poultice to keep out infection."

"Both of you must stay in my den overnight," he stepped back to address them both, "And in the morning I'll see if your wounds are healed enough to return to your den."

Lichennose parted his jaws to protest, but was too exhausted from the long day for a retort. He shifted on his mossy nest, relaxing. Soon, he drifted into a light sleep.

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The pitter-patter of rain broke through Lichennose's dreams, forcing him awake. He yawned, glancing around the black den, then outside. It was storming, again, and by the bleakness he guessed it was close to midnight.

He was about to fall back asleep, when he was suddenly aware of a throbbing pain in his side, where he'd been clawed earlier. Lichennose shifted, suspecting a twig was stabbing him, but the pain didn't cease.

"Willowwhisker!" he called drowsily, spotting two lumps of fur snoozing in the far corner. He soon spotted movement, as the medicine cat rose to his paws and strode over sleepily, his pelt still messy and tangled.

"What's the matter?" Willowwhisker asked calmly, turning to head for his herb storage.

"My flank feels like it's on fire." Lichennose snarled, trying to keep his voice soft but unable to due to the pain. He shifted again, but as he expected, nothing changed.

Willowwhisker paused, turning back towards the injured warrior. The medicine cat sat down at his belly, carefully peeling off the cobwebs he'd applied earlier. As he stared at the wound, worry clouded his dull eyes.

"The scratches are infected. I knew I should've applied more of the poultice." he sighed, "I'll go get the herbs." Then hurried off towards

the rock where everything was kept.

Lichennose's mind filled with dread, listening to the steady beating of rain. "But, I'm barely a warrior!" he protested, preparing for more, but couldn't form the words. If he was already too weak to speak, than maybe he should stay in the medicine cat's den.

Willowwhisker soon returned. Lichennose couldn't recognize the herbs through the darkness, only that they smelled strange and would probably taste as bad, maybe even worse. The matted tom quickly sat and dressed the wound in a new poultice and more webbing, making Lichennose wince.

"You sleep. If it hurts worse, tell me." Willowwhisker meowed, quickly returning to his own nest and settling back into it. Lichennose flicked his ear, the pain was slightly better.

The pale tabby laid his head down and watched shadows dance on the wall. He was exhausted by the day; a battle, rain, infected wounds... He couldn't imagine anything worse. Except picking ticks from Hollyfire's pelt.

Lichennose tried to stay awake, but eventually gave in to his mind's demands, and fell asleep in the darkness.

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Hope you liked! Any questions, theories? All comments are welcomed.

• Chapter Four •

Pale sunlight filtered into the medicine cats' den. As it shone on a tabby pelt, Lichennose awoke, shifting in his mossy nest and yawning. His side still ached where the infection brewed.

Glancing around the den, worry grew in his stomach like a cold lump of stone as he stared at his brother's nest. Bramblefoot was gone.

Lichennose lifted his gaze to peer out the den entrance. Willowwhisker and Berrystar were huddled close together just outside, speaking in low whispers. Sunlight made their outlines seem to glow against the camp.

"Willowwhisker!" Lichennose called, surprised to find his voice hoarse from sleep. He cleared his throat, then called the medicine cat's name again. Willowwhisker raised his head, dismissing himself from Berrystar and trotting towards Lichennose.

"My side still hurts.." the brown tabby complained as Willowwhisker entered the den. "I wanted to hunt today." Lichennose finished his sentence with a huff.

"No, you wouldn't. It looks like it'll storm again, clouds are on the horizon." the matted medicine cat turned to go fetch fresh herbs. Lichennose's eyes widened. *Another* day of rain? Pretty soon the whole forest would be drown! As the thought crossed his mind, another quickly replaced it. *I haven't seen the lake yet! It* must *be flooded!*

"Please, can I get up and go see the lake? I've never seen it after so much rainfall!" the tom begged. Willowwhisker soon returned, a bundle of leaves and cobwebs in his mouth. Dropping them and settling at Lichennose's side, he responded, "No. Your wound is still infected, and you can't risk it getting worse by trampling around the forest."

Lichennose huffed in annoyance, but quickly changed the subject as Willowwhisker began to peel off the old cobweb to replace it. "Where's Bramblefoot?"

"He's outside, speaking with Quailflight." Willowwhisker nosed new herbs onto Lichennose's infected wound, as another question wormed itself into the warrior's thoughts. "What were you and Berrystar talking about just now?"

Willowwhisker hesitated for a moment, glancing over his shoulder, before speaking, "We were discussing who Quailflight's mate might be. She isn't that close to anyone in the Clan, at least not close to have their kits. And if they *aren't* from ThunderClan, StarClan forbid, then who will father them." he quickly returned to fixing Lichennose's wound, padding some fresh cobwebs onto it.

Lichennose was shocked that the medicine cat revealed all that. He thought for a few moments. *I always have had a crush on her. Perhaps I should step up to father them? If I did, it will keep her out of trouble, if she really did have an affair with someone from another Clan.*

"I can help raise them." the words escaped Lichennose's mouth before he realized it. Willowwhisker looked shocked, but nodded, then hurried back out of the den. Lichennose suddenly felt a heavy weight on his shoulders, as thought Mudfoot was pinning him down again. *What have I gotten myself into?*

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Sorry it's short!

• Chapter Five •

"All cats old enough to hunt their own prey, gather beneath the Highledge for a Clan meeting!"

Lichennose looked up from his nest inside the medicine cat's den. Willowwhisker rose from his nest, and hurried over to help Lichennose to the den entrance.

"Come on, we can watch the meeting from here." Willowwhisker sat down with Lichennose on a flat, sun-warmed stone jutting out just outside the den. This was where he and Berrystar had been talking the former day. Lichennose settled onto his belly, tucking his forepaws under his chest.

The Clan was gathering in the main clearing. Stormgaze and Sorrelclaw sat together, their pelts brushing as Elmpaw settled next to them, the other apprentices forming a tight huddle nearby. Cedarwatcher and Bumblebee padded from the warriors' den and sat down, Webtail and Ashcloud close behind. Quailflight, belly plump with unborn kits, sat with Bramblefoot at her side. Lichennose gazed at her fondly for a moment. Sagetail and Pebblefur sat with their kits at the nursery's entrance, Fennelwhisker soon joining them with her lot. As the elders sauntered from their den and laid down just outside it, Berrystar began the meeting.

"As you all know, Quailflight is expecting kits. Unfortunately, she hasn't told who the father is." Berrystar glared at her for a moment. Lichennose shifted on the rock, Willowwhisker glancing at the far camp wall.

"However, someone must help raise these kits. Lichennose has offered to fill this role." Berrystar set his icy gaze on Lichennose, and the sudden attention made his pelt prickle like ants were crawling through it. The cats gathered stared at him.

Gazing over the crowd, Lichennose spotted Quailflight, her eyes

stretched wide in shock.

"The meeting is over."

As the cats dispersed, most heading towards the freshkill-pile to grab something to eat, Quailflight headed towards Lichennose. Willowwhisker dipped back inside the shade of his den.

"Lichennose... Why did you want to help with raising the kits?" Quailflight questioned, sitting right beside him. She was clearly exhausted, even from only padding such a little way. Her belly bulged unnaturally.

Lichennose blinked, "They need a father, and a younger warrior will be alive for more of the kits' life." He watched as Quailflight processed the information. Lichennose hid what he truly knew to be the answer - he wanted to father them because he'd always had a crush on her. But Quailflight didn't need to know that, as long as he was a loving father.

After a few moments, which seemed like endless seasons, Quailflight sighed. "You're right. I hope the kits will make good warriors."

"I'm sure they will." Lichennose was happy the subject had been changed. He didn't want to talk about why he offered to help.

"I can help you father some fresh moss for your nest, if you want." he purred softly, shifting to get more comfortable. Just as the words escape his jaws, a yowl came from inside the den, "No way! You cannot leave the camp until that infection's gone down!"

Lichennose grumbled, fixing Willowwhisker with a harsh glare. Turning back to Quailflight, he meowed, "Maybe Bramblefoot can gather some instead?"

"No, that's alright. The apprentices and queens already helped me get settled in the nursery." Quailflight declined with a kind smile. Lichennose understood, though really did want to get out of the camp, to feel the wind in his fur and the grass under his paws. He felt enclosed by the stone walls for the first time in his life.

As Quailflight hopped off the rock and went towards the nursery, Bramblefoot replaced her spot. He wore a proud smile.

"It's nice that you'll be fathering kits soon. I guess it's nice to start a family early." Bramblefoot sat down, tail swishing in excitement. He rarely appeared this happy.

With a sly grin, Lichennose responded, "You have any plans of having kits?"

Bramblefoot snorted, and cuffed his brother over his ears. "There isn't a she-cat in all four Clans fit to be my mate." Lichennose chuckled, about to continue, when a voice rang from inside the den.

"This conversation is one for the warriors' den, you two." Willowwhisker sounded more annoyed than amused. Bramblefoot's ears turned red, and he padded off towards the shade of an over-arching oak tree.

Embarrassed that the medicine cat heard, Lichennose tried to change the subject. "Hey, where's Cloudpaw? I haven't seen her around."

Willowwhisker's eyes glistened from the shadows, "I sent her to gather chervil for your infection, but she hasn't come back. I hope nothing bad's happened - she doesn't have the proper training to fight if she runs into trouble." His tail swished in the darkness.

Lichennose pricked his ears, desperate for a chance to get into the forest. "I could go look for her! I can fight, and I'm a great tracker!"

Willowwhisker stood from where he was sorting herbs, fixing Lichennose with a hard stare. "No," his voice was firm, "You know as well as I that you can't leave yet. I've told you this many times, Lichennose!"

Lichennose huffed in frustration. *At this rate, I'll be living in here.* Laying his head down on the warm rock, he gazed over camp. Warriors slipped in and out from patrols, cats ate and chatted, and sun made the stones seem to glow. Even if he was stuck here, at least his and Quailflight's kits would be safe and happy to grow up

in such a sheltered, welcoming place.

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Sorry for *another* short chapter.

• Chapter Six •

Almost there. Just one more bound.

Blood roared in his ears.

I can do this.

Eyes focusing on the squirrel a mouse-length from his muzzle, Lichennose pounced. Adrenaline still pumped through his veins as the warrior reared his head, preparing for a death blow. Suddenly, a crow screeched, and he jolted awake.

Lichennose had been dreaming.

Dusty light filtered into the den. The musty scents of mingled leaves and berries tainted the air. Outside, the bird was still cawing madly, and from the dim golden light seeping through the entrance, he guessed it was sundown.

Willowwhisker and Cloudpaw were gone. He recalled the former night, when the apprentice had returned, but with borage instead of chervil. Willowwhisker had yelled at her, before they left to gather the correct herb. *I wonder if they've come back yet. I must've slept all day.*

As Lichennose pondered the thought, a large, matted shape dipped its head into the den. It was Willowwhisker, and in the half-light, it was clear he wasn't holding any herbs. *They must've come back earlier,* Lichennose observed, *and stored away the chervil already.*

"The Gathering's tonight." Willowwhisker's voice dragged Lichennose from his thoughts, "Me and Cloudpaw will be goi—" Before he had completed the sentence, Lichennose interrupted, "Can I *please* go? I'll be madder than a fox in a fit if I'm cooped up in here any longer! ...No offense." he realized how rude his words sounded only after they'd been spoken.

Willowwhisker's gaze hardened. He approached Lichennose, sitting next to the warrior's wound. *I hope I didn't say something wrong... Great StarClan, now he's mad!*

Luckily, the medicine cat remained quiet. He gently peeled off the cobweb, and appeared surprised for a moment, before going to fetch fresher webbing. *Is it more infected? Oh, it better not be... At this rate, I'll be an elder before I hunt or see the forest again!*

Willowwhisker poked his head out from the herb storage, cobwebs wrapped around his paw. "Lichennose, I'm not angry. And the infection *is* getting better, it just needs a new layer of webbing. I won't need to add a poultice this time." Lichennose was immensely relieved, but a little suspicious. *How did he know I thought he was mad?*

"So does that mean I can go the Gathering?" Lichennose's suspicion melted like dew in the morning sunshine as the thought crossed his mind. Willowwhisker flicked his ear, not answering as he padded over and dressed the wound. Slowly, he replied, "Alright. But make sure I can keep an eye on you."

Lichennose nearly jumped out of his pelt in joy. *Yes! Finally! My first Gathering as a warrior!* He kneaded the moss in excitement as Willowwhisker finished padding on cobwebs. "Stay close to me during the Gathering. I don't want to see you opening that wound from trying to show off. And remember, no fighting with the other Clans." All the information skimmed right over Lichennose's head.

The pale tabby staggered to his paws and hurried out of the den, dashing across the rock and down into the main clearing of camp. He drew in a deep breath, relishing the scents of all his Clanmates. They were huddled under the Highledge, waiting for Berrystar to announce who would go. Lichennose padded over to join them, Willowwhisker less than a tail-length behind. Lichennose could almost feel the medicine cat's gaze boring into his flank, keeping an eye on his wound.

Lichennose sat next to Quailflight. She wouldn't be coming, but he could at least spend some time with her now. Unfortunately, before he could say anything, a white shape slid out and faced the crowd

of cats.

Berrystar raised his voice to be heard throughout camp, "The cats who will go to this moon's Gathering are me, Juniperwhisker, Willowwhisker and his apprentice, Bramblefoot, Asterfoot, Sorrelclaw, Aspenshade, Cedarwatcher, Webtail, Elmpaw, Flypaw, Mothpaw, and Brackenpaw." *That's a lot of cats for just one Gathering. The others will think he's brought his whole Clan. Maybe that's a good thing...*

Before Lichennose could finish the thought, his Clanmates began to move, forcing him along with them. They paused at the camp entrance, to make sure everyone had gathered, before heading out into the dimming forest.

Lichennose padded alongside Cedarwatcher, spotting Bramblefoot fall into step with Aspenshade. Lichennose almost wanted to strike up a conversation between him and the elderly warrior, but knew it would be better to keep quiet.

Soon, the thick trunk of the Ancient Oak came into view. It was bleak and dark in the moonlight, outlined by silver. The sound of water broke through the air, and Lichennose was shocked to see the lake water nearly touching the Ancient Oak's exposed roots. In the half-light, he could see water already pooling in the burrow among its roots.

After jumping the Moonpool Stream, the cats of ThunderClan skirted the flooded lake in WindClan territory. The ground underpaw was mushy and muddy, puddles gleaming in the moonlight. It looked more like RiverClan territory than the normally dry, grassy moors of WindClan.

Lichennose glanced at the vast lake. Its surface glittered in the half-light, and reflected the stars high above. He was shoved from behind by Elmpaw, muttering an apology before hurrying to catch up.

After a short trudge past the Horseplace, the Gathering island came into view, the leaves of the great oak outlined in silver, shifting as a breeze blew past. Lichennose watched his Clanmarks hurry across

the fallen log, the old bark shaking under their weight. *Finally, my turn.* Lichennose bunched his haunches and leapt onto the wood, a shiver running down his spine as it shook below his paws. He scampered across the elderly tree, leaping for the island and wincing at mud squished between his toes.

Lichennose glanced around the island, heading for the spot where his Clanmates were huddled. It was bordered by tall pine trees, and at the far side, a massive oak tree's branches seemed to scrape the jet-black sky. Lichennose's paws were already caked in mud when he noticed the cats of ThunderClan splitting up. He followed Bramblefoot, both toms sitting next to the ShadowClan warriors. Lichennose shivered as he noticed Mudfoot among the crowd.

Lichennose's gaze travelled over the gathered Clans. *RiverClan's late,* he thought, tail whisking behind him. Glancing up at the great oak, he spotted Berrystar's snow-white pelt climbing up to sit on a branch a few tail-lengths below Morningstar, who was perched among the highest leaves. Patchstar was shifting from paw-to-paw on a branch opposite to Berrystar.

Lichennose suddenly noticed that the ShadowClan cats were glaring at him with angry gazes. He felt his pelt prickle, and moved to sit next to WindClan instead. Lichennose stared at the sodden-pawed, thin warriors who lived on the moorland. *I shouldn't talk to them, they'll be as grouchy as a fox in a fit with all this bad weather.*

Suddenly, the fallen tree rattled, and he looked over his shoulder to see RiverClan hopping onto the island. They had a hostile glint in their eyes. Lichennose felt unease creeping up on him, but remained silent as Rushstar climbed the great oak to sit in a crook between two branches.

"The Gathering shall begin!" Patchstar's voice rang out over the scattered warriors below. "I will start. Despite the constant downpours, WindClan hasn't had any trouble catching prey, and the rain has kept twolegs off our territory. We are still strong, and are prepared to defend our borders if necessary." The leader cast a glance at Berrystar. *Is she saying ThunderClan will cross into WindClan's moors? We would never!* He curled his lip but didn't voice his disgrace. Looking over at the gathered WindClan cats, another

thought tugged on his mind. *WindClan's thin and clearly hungry. Patchstar's just saying they aren't having trouble so they don't look weak. I can't blame her.*

Morningstar reported his news next. He spoke of the same boggy territory, and that they had a new apprentice, Cloverpaw. She stood and fluffed out her chest, the other Clans chanting her name before Morningstar continued further, "However, there has been activity on ThunderClan's border. I hope we will not need to battle again." he cast a rather angry-looking glance at Berrystar, who stiffened. *Why's he look so mad? ShadowClan's the one who attacked us. He must've slept on a bed of ticks to be this grumpy.*

Next was Berrystar. "The lake is dangerously flooded, but other than that, ThunderClan hasn't faced any trouble. There have been odd scents near the abdomen twoleg nest, but whoever's there hasn't caused any damage." *Weird. He didn't mention the border fight. Maybe he doesn't want to anger Morningstar any further.* Lichennose flicked an ear.

"The river is swollen from all this rain, but we've managed." After a few moments of ominous silence, Rushstar began. "Twolegs are bringing their water-monsters close to our land, but I doubt they'll come down close to our camp. The river is yet to overflow wide enough for them." Rushstar dipped her head to signal that she'd finished.

"Is everyone done, then?" Patchstar asked, her gaze traveling over her fellow leaders. It was normal for the cat who started the Gathering to also bring it to a close. After receiving silence, the calico continued, "Okay, then the Gathering is over. May StarClan light your paths." she began to climb down from her branch, the others leaders following. They rounded up their cats and started to head home.

Lichennose slid past Cloverpaw and a bushy-tailed gray tom, joining Bramblefoot as he padded across the fallen oak. While the two brothers fell into place with their Clan, the moon beginning to dip towards the horizon, Lichennose was distracted by his mind.

I wonder why Rushstar, and all of RiverClan, seemed so upset about

something. he thought, *And the entire Gathering was full of hostile glares instead of friendly chatter. I wonder why.*

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Finally, a longer chapter. Who's your favorite characters so far?

• Chapter Seven •

Sunlight shifted through the red-and-orange leaved trees, casting bright shadows across the forest. Among the trunks, a group of cats trotted along a hard, dusty dirt trail.

Lichennose was among them. It'd been six sunrises since the Gathering, and his infection had healed just two days before. Now, he was able to join in patrols again, and the feeling of finally stretching his legs was great. He was flanked by Cedarwatcher, as they followed Asterfoot and Thorntail down the old thunderpath towards the abandoned twoleg nest to check on the odd scents. The former day's hunting and border patrols had all reported of stronger, fresher scents.

Lichennose shivered at the chill on the breeze, snatching him away from his thoughts. Glancing off the trail, he watched a shriveled red leaf drift down towards the dulling grass, which was scattered with many other leaves and close-to-dying plants. It was nearly mid Leaffall, and the forest was showing it.

The patrol rounded a huge elm with yellow-and-orange leaves, spotting the abandoned twoleg nest. Lichennose shivered again, but this time not from the cold. The nest always spooked him. Asterfoot trotted forward, legs stiff, and bowed his head to sniff at the grass closest to them. He curled his lip, looking back at the three cats. "The scent is definitely fresher here than yesterday. And stronger, too. Whoever's been coming surely wants it to belong to them." Cedarwatcher's eyes widened and he stiffened.

Lichennose narrowed his eyes, seeing something shift between the shadows inside the old nest. He felt as if all the ice to ever exist had been dumped on him, and he froze in terror. *Who in all the stars is here?*

"Move aside, I'll scare them right out of their flea-ridden pelts!" with a tremendous yowl, Thorntail charged forward, leaping right through a square-shaped, crumbling hole in one stone wall. At the

corners of the hole, sharp, dusty shards of scratched ice stuck out like jagged claws. Asterfoot screeched in shock, jumping in after him with an annoyed growl.

"No! Get back out here!" Cedarwatcher yelped, his tail bushing out in fear. Lichennose unsheathed his claws, standing rigid, as if he expected a wave of hissing rouges to leap out and tear his pelt off.

Suddenly, the slack of wood hanging off one of the taller openings close to the ground creaked, and Asterfoot padded out, dragging an angry Thorntail by his brown scruff. "It's just a mouse! Don't get your fur in a twist!"

Lichennose relaxed, but couldn't shake the feeling of being watched.

"Then what are all the scents for?" Thorntail hissed, outraged as he yanked himself from Asterfoot's grasp. "A loner must've come here to inspect it, but left when it smelled us." Asterfoot growled, his bristling tail lashing. *Great StarClan, they'll be shredding one another to mousedust soon!*

"Now, settle down, you two." Cedarwatcher stepped forward, still stiff from shock. "As long as it's gone, there's no reason to stick around here. Why don't we hunt? The Clan will need lots of food stocked up before Leafbare hits."

Lichennose admired the older tom's calmness as he paused the other warriors' argument. Thorntail huffed, Asterfoot glaring at his denmate. After a few moments, both cats agreed.

"Alright. Lichennose and Cedarwatcher, you can go along the old thunderpath, and maybe check if any squirrels are sheltering in the ancient oak. Nobody's gone down there for a while. But be careful, I don't want any drown Clanmates!" he ended in a higher-pitched tone, warning them with a glint in his eyes. "Thorntail and I will be heading down to the WindClan border. We'll refresh it while we're there." Asterfoot flicked his tail, and the patrol split up.

Cedarwatcher turned, leading the way down the old trail. "StarClan, they better not get into another fight while hunting." the

old tom muttered under his breath, annoyance sparking in his eyes. Lichennose realized he hadn't been meant to hear, and didn't say anything about it.

Lichennose's gaze traveled over the edges of the path, spotting a yellow furze plant growing in clumps along one side.

"Should we check over there for mouse holes? They might be sheltering from the cold there." He flicked an ear as Cedarwatcher turned, glancing at the bush. The old warrior nodded, "Good eyes."

Lichennose felt pride swell in his chest. *Yes! I impressed a senior warrior!* He crept after Cedarwatcher as both cats snuck towards the plant, ears perked. Cedarwatcher fell back a tail-length from the bush, allowing Lichennose to sniff among the fronds.

He parted his jaws to draw in more of the scent. The musty smell of old leaves, the furze's flowers, and stale mouse. *It's too dull to be fresher than a day or two,* he rose to his paws and looked at the older ton, "Nope, no prey here."

"We should go down to the ancient oak, like Asterfoot suggested." Cedarwatcher twitched his whiskers, the fur along his spine prickling. *From the cold, probably,* Lichennose observed, "How about you head down towards it, and I'll stay up here? That way, we cover both places in less time. If anything happens, we can just yowl for each other." Lichennose waved his tail. Cedarwatcher hesitated for a moment, then nodded, "Yes, that sounds good." he turned and started down the cold trail.

Lichennose flicked his tail-tip and, sniffing the air, picked up the scent of squirrel. He padded towards a clump of thin-stemmed ferns, their leaves shriveled and providing little shelter. The pale tabby dropped into a hunter's crouch, though froze in place when a twig snapped nearby. *Someone's watching me.*

Before Lichennose could get to his paws, the smell of a stranger cat swamped his senses, and a black shape tackled him to the ground. Lichennose gasped in shock, the dark tom slashing his claws across the tabby's nose.

Lichennose thrashed under his grip, but couldn't struggle free. *Great StarClan, it's the border fight all over again! I can't be trapped in the medicine cat's den for the rest of my life!* Out of the corner of his eye, he glimpsed a red-brown striped pelt charging towards them. *Cedarwatcher!*

Lichennose tried to kick at the stranger's belly, but Cedarwatcher caught up and threw him off, both cats rolling on the trail and grappling at one another. Lichennose leapt onto his paws, and as he watched them, the battle between Aspenshade and Mudfoot clung to his mind like stubborn cobwebs. *Why do I always have to be saved? I'm not a helpless kit, I can fight for myself!*

Suddenly, the black tom slid from Cedarwatcher's grasp, and backed against an old oak tree. He hissed, tail bushing out and lashing. Lichennose finally got a good look at him. The tom was rather scrawny, but thick-muscled, probably from lots of fights. His legs were shockingly long, and his ears bigger than normal. Lichennose recalled seeing cats with similar traits at the Gathering, especially in Patchstar.

Lichennose was suddenly aware of the blood dripping from his nose. *Great, now I've got a nosebleed.*

"Who are you?" Lichennose demanded, after realizing Cedarwatcher hadn't spoken yet. The rouge glanced between them before raising his head and answering, "My name is Samwise. One of your... *Clanmates* barged into our home earlier today, and Raven sent me to find you." Lichennose thought back to the abandoned twoleg nest. *I* knew *there was a reason I felt uneasy! He was the thing I saw in the shadows!*

"That '*Clanmate*' is named Thorntail." Lichennose hissed, lowering his ears. *Dumb rouge! He should know not to mess with ThunderClan warriors!*

Cedarwatcher stepped forward, murmuring in Lichennose's ear, "All we can do is tell Berrystar." The pale tabby lashed his tail in annoyance, wanting only to shred this stranger, but felt unease stab his pelt like claws when blood started to trickle down his throat.

"Fine. Take this as a warning, *Samwise*. Now get your flea-ridden tail back to wherever you come from, and tell all your friends to stay off of ThunderClan territory!" he fluffed out his chest. It had somehow spooked Samwise, as he scampered off into the trees with a spiked pelt.

Cedarwatcher let Lichennose lean on his shoulder on the way back. *How was I suddenly so commanding?* Lichennose wondered, *Is that how it feels to be a leader? Probably.* He suddenly realized they were at the camp's entrance. The pale tom slid down the rocks, Cedarwatcher on his tail. The two split up as the elderly warrior headed towards Berrystar's den. Not wanting to gather attention, Lichennose hurried towards Willowwhisker's den. *My nose better not be infected. Another moon in this den and I'll be madder than a fox in a fit!*

Lichennose dipped into the den, flicking an ear. Willowwhisker poked his head out from the herb storage, eyeing him, "Great StarClan, what now?" Lichennose padded forward, his head low to keep the blood from going down his throat, and explained what'd happened.

Willowwhisker inspected his muzzle for a moment, "You're lucky, it's only a nosebleed." *'Only a nosebleed'? What else could've happened?* "All you need is some cobwebs and it'll be gone in a few minutes." The matted medicine cat returned to his herbs for a moment, then padded back with a stick swathed in webbing. *Dear StarClan, it's the infection all over again.*

After Willowwhisker had padded cobwebs on to stop the blood, he spoke again, "Keep your head down to keep it out of your throat. And if the bleeding continues for too long, come back here so I can check it. When the bleeding's stopped you can just throw the cobwebs out in the woods." Lichennose nodded, sniffling. Webbing got sucked into his nose, and he coughed a little. *Ew...*

Lichennose then padded out of the den, hopping into the main clearing of camp and trotting over to the warriors' den, aware of the stares focused in his direction. *Berrystar will probably call a meeting later and explain what happened to everyone.*

He raised his head as Quailflight padded from the nursery, her belly fat with unborn kits. She turned, heading in his direction with a swaying tail and smile. *We've grown closer since the Gathering.*

"What's happened to your nose?" she asked, rubbing her cheek with hers then sitting beside him. Lichennose noticed how she sat awkwardly. *She can't sit straight with that swollen belly,* he observed, then replied with, "Me and Cedarwatcher met a rouge named Samwise while on patrol. He gave me a good hit straight to my muzzle, but we chased him off."

Fear filled his mate's eyes, "Is he gone now?" Lichennose nodded, purring as fondness for Quailflight filled his senses, "I scared him right out of his flea-ridden fur." Quailflight purred with a short chuckle, and nuzzled his shoulder, gazing over the camp. "Our kits will be happy here, Lichennose."

"Yep. They sure will, Quailflight. I promise."

—

Woo! 'Nother long chapter. Which cat do you think is the *real* father to Quailflight's kits? I want to know what you all think!

• Chapter Eight •

Pitter, patter. Pitter, patter. Pitter, patter.

Lichennose blinked open his eyes in the warriors' den, glancing outside. The camp was dull with a slight drizzle. He was fairly surprised - he hadn't seen rain in anything but a downpour in a few moons.

The pale warrior glanced at his brother's nest. It was empty. *He went on the dawn patrol,* he recalled, ear twitching. Lichennose stiffly got to his paws, parting his jaws in a long yawn and stretching each leg individually. Afterward, he headed outside, tail whisking behind him.

Lichennose's striped pelt prickled a little at the drizzle. He looked up. The sky was shockingly bright despite the rain. The tom lowered his gaze and glanced around camp. His Clanmates were doing their daily duties. *Must be past sunrise. Why hasn't the dawn patrol come back yet?*

Suddenly, a yowl broke through the air, and a dark figure came rushing into camp. Lichennose jumped, and as the rest of the Clan began to gather, recognized the cat as Flypaw. *He went on the dawn patrol too! Where are the others?*

Berrystar shouldered past his Clanmates to face the apprentice, "Flypaw, why have you returned alone?" His tail tip flicked.

"We need backup! ShadowClan attacked!" Flypaw's eyes were stretched wide as moons. *Again? Dear StarClan, what is it that ShadowClan want from us?*

Lichennose spotted a flash of red, and realized that Flypaw was bleeding from a gash on his shoulder. Willowwhisker hurried up, began to usher him to the medicine cat's den, and murmured, "Berrystar, you must send others to help."

Lichennose immediately jumped up, "May I please go?" *Bramblefoot needs my help!* Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed Quailflight staring at him, wide-eyed. Berrystar fixed him with a hard stare, "Alright. Bring Bumblebee and Asterfoot with you."

The pale tabby twitched his tail tip, the other two gathering at his side. Lichennose cast a gaze at Quailflight, as if he were promising her that he'd return un-scathed. But that wasn't something he *could* promise.

With the drizzle beginning to cease, the three cats set out. They hurried through the forest, until the sounds of yowling broke the air. Bumblebee hissed, "ShadowClan's always causing trouble these days."

As the cats arrived in the clearing, Lichennose was shocked to see that they were outnumbered. *Did they bring their whole Clan to attack?* Bumblebee suddenly tackled a dark tabby, both she-cats collapsing in a snarling ball of fur and claws. Asterfoot disappeared in the array of pelts.

Lichennose darted past a pale cream she-cat, searching for Bramblefoot in the growling crowd. But before he could spot his brother, he felt a heavy weight on his shoulders, and was struck down by a huge, fluffy dark gray tom.

Lichennose was caught off-guard, but lashed out at the stranger's belly with his hind legs, hoping to rip into his flesh. The ShadowClan cat snarled, eyes narrowing. Lichennose sliced at the tom's muzzle, appearing surprised when he toppled over and collapsed onto the ground. *I threw him off?*

Not taking time to ponder how the huge cat had lost his footing so easily, the pale tabby leapt over the ShadowClan warrior and past Bumblebee wrestling with a tawny-colored tom with long claws. Gaze searching the fray, he finally spotted Bramblefoot, grappling with a red-brown she-cat who was too young to be a full warrior. Lichennose paused, ducking down to stay safe, and watched in terror as Mudfoot shoved the apprentice aside and faced him with narrowed eyes.

Bramblefoot leapt to his paws and hissed, aggression flashing in his eyes. "You... You hurt my brother!" He declared, tackling her to the ground and slashing at her eyes. Lichennose suddenly darted forward, knocking Mudfoot to the ground and growling in rage.

Lichennose clawed at her ears, but was shocked when she fell still. *Have I already won?* He loosened his grip, and prepared to hop off, but was suddenly thrown back when she exploded upwards with a tremendous snarl. Mudfoot grabbed his shoulders, and dragged him down, pinning the pale tabby.

Lichennose screeched as she gripped his scruff with her teeth, tearing him off the ground and shaking him vigorously as though he were merely a scrawny mouse. His eyes widened as the world blurred around him. Mudfoot dropped him harshly and pressed her forepaw roughly against his head, pinning him down. Lichennose gasped for breath, *StarClan, please, let me live!*

Suddenly, a yowl rang over the fighting cats, "ThunderClan, retreat! Retreat!"

Lichennose felt the weight lift from his head, and quickly scrambled to join his Clanmates, the world still fuzzy. Behind him, a hiss broke through the air, "You're lucky, fox-breath! Next time, I'll shred you to mousedust!"

Lichennose sat down beside Asterfoot, who'd called the retreat. He had a scratched-up flank and a cheek wound. Bramblefoot staggered up to them, his ears bloody and his shoulder bleeding. *I think we're all already shredded to mousedust.*

Bramblefoot leaned against Lichennose's shoulder, supporting his dizzy brother. "Thank you for throwing her off," he murmured with a twitch of his ear. Lichennose still felt sick from being tossed around.

The patrol gathered, all bleeding and weak, then staggered back to camp.

Their Clanmates immediately rushed out to meet them, gasping in shock at all the blood. The kits scampered to the front in hopes of

knowing what happened, appearing horrified at the sight, before their mothers pulled them away. Berrystar pushed to the front, but before he could speak, Willowwhisker began to usher the injured cats away towards his den.

"I might as well be living here." Lichennose murmured, half-closing his eyes. "If you keep getting hurt, you will." Willowwhisker retorted with a flick of his tail.

The bloody cats all flopped down in their own nests, clearly exhausted from all the recent fighting. Lichennose glanced around at them, Bramblefoot settling down beside him. Bumblebee's eyes were half-closed, with a long, jagged, bleeding wound going from her right shoulder down across her flank to her tail. Worry grew in Lichennose's belly, *Great StarClan! Who did that?*

Lichennose suddenly felt the world spinning, and laid his head onto his forepaws. *Might as well catch a nap. My wounds aren't so bad.*

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Lichennose blinked open his eyes, glancing around the den he was in. *Medicine cat's den,* he recognized it on the spot. Willowwhisker was sorting plants with Cloudpaw, or, more grumbling at her to stop crushing berries, near the herb storage.

"What happened?" he asked, yawning and stretching his forelegs out. Willowwhisker turned his head, "Oh good, you're awake! You fell asleep after the ShadowClan fight. Luckily, you hardly had any wounds this time."

Lichennose suddenly remembered the fight, and being shaken so violently by Mudfoot. There was no doubt he'd be having nightmares of it all moon. "Where's Bramblefoot?"

Willowwhisker twitched his whiskers, "I sent them back to the warriors' den. The sun will be going down soon, and they all deserve a good night's rest." The medicine cat then cast a nervous glance at a nest not too far from Lichennose's. The pale tabby turned his head also, spotting Bumblebee, on her side with her eyes closed. The she-cat's breathing was slow and jagged, her side

swathed in cobwebs. Willowwhisker noticed his staring and added, "I'm worried for her. She hasn't woken up since the fight, and her wound is critical."

"May I return to the warriors' den? I don't want to disturb you or her." Lichennose kept his tone polite, not wanting to seem rude. *He's been through a lot lately, healing all these wounds and making sure nobody dies. It must be a hard job with ShadowClan attacking every other patrol.*

"Of course, but if anything starts hurting, come back immediately." Willowwhisker replied and went back to sorting herbs, every few moments glancing back at Bumblebee. Lichennose quietly got to his paws and skirted past Bumblebee's nest—careful not to block Willowwhisker's sight of her—then headed out of the den.

The sun was beginning to disappear behind the high rock walls sheltering camp as Lichennose emerged into the main clearing. A light breeze ruffled his fur. He padded past Sorrelclaw and Stormgaze, who were chatting, and went towards the fresh-kill pile.

Lichennose's gaze scanned the prey. *A hunting patrol must've set out after the fight,* he thought, *there's more prey than when we went out to help.* The tom grabbed a fresh squirrel and quickly trotted for his den, flicking his tail.

Lichennose ducked under the curtain of lichen and moss, plopping down in his nest. Bramblefoot, in a nest beside him, raised his head from grooming and appeared happy that his brother had finally joined them. "Are you alright after the battle?"

Lichennose turned to face him and smiled kindly, "Of course I am." He then took a bite of the squirrel, savoring its taste. *If it keeps raining as often as it has, all the squirrels will be sheltering in the trees.* Lichennose looked around the den, frowning at all his injured Clanmates. There wasn't a single cat without a new scar or wound from the recent patrol battles. How long would ShadowClan keep this up?

He then gazed out the den entrance, where shadows were

gathering at the rocks like cats arriving at a Gathering, merging and shifting until his view of camp was dark. *I wonder what Quailflight's doing.*

Figuring he'd see her in the morning, Lichennose nosed the rest of his squirrel to the edges of his nest, and rested his head down on his forepaws. His eyelids grew heavy, and eventually closed, the silence lulling him to sleep.

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Aha, chapter eight! Haven't reached this far in a book for a while. I actually finished this around 1:30 today, but I was at the river and so I couldn't publish it. Who's your favorite character(s) so far? It'd be nice to know who! I know I've asked this question in the past, but with the plot continuing now, it might've changed for some of you.

• Chapter Nine •

Lichennose blinked awake in the warriors' den, chatter stirring in the air outside.

Curious, he stood, then stretched each leg in turn before padding out into the main clearing of camp. No warriors or apprentices were there, and it was eerily empty, other than the queens and elders speaking in hushed voices. Nobody seemed to notice Lichennose, until Quailflight raised her head and hurriedly trotted over to him, her sides plump with unborn kits.

"Lichennose! The moor's been set on fire!" she exclaimed, ears perked. Lichennose's jaws gaped open, "What?" Quailflight twitched her tail, "Nobody's sure, but smoke has been rising from WindClan territory since dawn. Every cat's gathered by the stream."

Lichennose touched his nose to her forehead in a short message of fondness, then hurried out of camp and towards the stream. As expected, his Clanmates were gathered by its bank, chattering like sparrows. Like Quailflight said, a dark cloud of smog rose from the high moorlands.

He trotted forward and wove among his Clanmates, spotting Berrystar and Juniperwhisker sitting closest to the water, their heads close together as they spoke in hushed voices. Lichennose soon saw his brother and flicked his ear, "Is it true the moor's been smoking all day?" He loved Quailflight, but even the kindest cat couldn't lie that she sometimes over exaggerated.

"Mhm. The dawn patrol saw smoke, and came back to tell the Clan." Bramblefoot twitched his tail tip, eyes fixated on the far moorlands. Lichennose followed his gaze. *There's no way that fire started naturally,* he thought, *not with all this rain.*

Suddenly, silhouettes appeared over a rise, and cats came running down toward them. Lichennose's Clanmates stood and grew stiff, some unsheathing their claws. *We shouldn't be preparing for a fight,*

WindClan's fleeing their territory, not looking for battle!

Patchstar slid to a halt at the opposite side of the stream, the rest of WindClan following. "Please, let us cross!" she begged, tone desperate. Lichennose had never seen a Clan leader so terrified.

"What's happened?" Berrystar and his deputy stepped up, blocking her path across the stream. "I'll answer once my Clan is safe!" Patchstar replied, fur bristling and claws flexing. She was clearly ready to fight her way across.

Berrystar thought for a few heartbeats, gaze steady. *How could he have to think this over? They clearly need somewhere to shelter!*

"...Fine. You may cross." Berrystar finally stepped aside, his Clanmates also moving to allow a path through. Patchstar thanked him silently with a twitch of her ear, and her cats splashed across, one by one. Three were carrying kits. The WindClan cats ran through, and paused at the back of the mass of ThunderClan warriors. Their pelts were ashy and bristling, eyes wide with fear.

Patchstar, Mudcloud, Berrystar, and Juniperwhisker all sat huddled together at the edge of their Clanmates, speaking in low voices. *Will WindClan stay here?* Lichennose flicked his tail tip, and looked back at the hills, somewhat shocked to see more smoke and the tips of flames licking at the rise that WindClan had fled over.

Lichennose then glanced at the cats who'd come across the stream. They were terrified, not only of the fire, but probably also because they were very vulnerable to attack here. Putting on a warm smile, he carefully padded over. *They shouldn't be so scared. We just let them cross, we won't attack.*

After a few moments, a lanky gray tabby left her Clanmates to meet him.

"Hello. My name's Goosethroat." she kept her tone soft and polite, dipping her head kindly. Her pale eyes were friendly, but shock still showed clear in their depths.

"Lichennose." the light tabby replied, settling onto his belly and

tucking his striped legs under his chest, "What happened in your territory to cause such a big fire?" Over her shoulder, he saw the WindClan cats beginning to groom soot from their fur.

Goosethroat also laid down, "Some twoleg kits were fooling around with fire by the forest, and accidentally set the grass aflame. They fled, but the fire spread." With a shiver, she added, "I bet the flames have reached far beyond our camp by now."

Lichennose's eyes stretched wide with terror. A cold feeling ran down his spine at the thought of his home burning to a field of spindly twigs covered in ash. "Do you think it could spread to the forest?"

Goosethroat shook her head, "I doubt."

"Hey, tabby! Why don't you stop sticking your nose in other Clan's business?" Lichennose looked up when he heard the offensive yowl. It had come from a cream tabby, sitting nearby with her fur smudged gray. Quickly after, a cat who looked the exact same gasped, and swiftly tried to hush the first cat to yowl.

"They're Heatherpaw and Brightpaw." Goosethroat flicked her ear, glancing back at them.

Suddenly, a yowl rang over the WindClan and ThunderClan cats. It belonged to Berrystar, "WindClan shall be staying in the field on our side of the stream until their territory's safe to live again!" Lichennose was momentarily shocked, but after a quick glance over the desperate WindClanners, he understood.

Patchstar and Mudcloud gathered up their Clanmates, "Well, we'll be off to find nesting materials. Thank you for letting us stay, Berrystar." Patchstar dipped her head to the fellow leader respectfully. Berrystar nodded, then gazed across his own Clan, "Alright, back to camp!"

Lichennose got to his paws, and returned to his own Clanmates. After a few short moments of making sure everyone was gathered, they headed back to camp.

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Sorry, another short chapter. I'm tired and just wanted to write this quickly. Question, who's your guy's *least* favorite character so far?

• Chapter Ten •

Leaves shifted under pale paws as Lichennose crept across the leaf litter, stalking a mouse.

The sky was milky with early dawn above the orange and red treetops, the clouds sparse. Lichennose wriggled his haunches, narrowing his eyes as he prepared to pounce, taking one more step toward the mouse.

Snap!

He stepped on a twig hidden under the layer of dead leaves, breaking it in two. The mouse's head shot up from nibbling on a seed, and upon spotting him, darted for its hole between two tree roots. Lichennose gasped, chasing after it and sending leaves fluttering in the air behind him.

Unfortunately, right as he slammed his paws down less than a whisker-length from the hole, his prey disappeared. "Fox-dung!" he spat under his breath.

"Bad catch?" a lean silver head poked out of some old brambles a few tail-lengths behind him. Lichennose turned, recognizing her as Webtail. They'd set out to hunt together soon before dawn, Asterfoot seeming upset he couldn't join, instead being put on a patrol to see how WindClan was doing.

"Mhm. Dumb twig..." he muttered the last part, the fur along his spine twitching as he padded over to Webtail. Noticing the dryness of his tongue, he added, "Can we go get something to drink?"

Webtail nodded, "Sure. I caught an old blackbird, and buried it under the big ash tree. It was a lucky catch, I guess, it must've been just waking up." Lichennose recalled seeing the tree shortly after they'd left camp.

"Let's drink from the stream at the WindClan border, I don't want

to be attacked by ShadowClan." Webtail twitched her long, slender tail, and started through the orange-leaved trees. The thought of Mudfoot's violent acts made Lichennose shiver, and he hurried to catch up.

The two padded side-by-side. "Do you think WindClan will steal prey?" Webtail suddenly asked, catching Lichennose off guard. He shook his head after a moment, "I doubt it. They can't hunt in a forest."

They arrived shortly after, pausing at the edge of the forest. Over a rise, three WindClan cats were chasing a skinny rabbit. "They'll have to start catching field mice," Lichennose thought aloud, "There aren't as many rabbits on this side, and their thinner than the ones on the moor." Webtail twitched her ear and added, "If there's any left on the moor after the fire."

Lichennose nodded quickly and slid past her, padding to the quick-moving stream that fed into the lake. Webtail quickly caught up. Both cats crouched down to lap at its clear surface. Lichennose almost recoiled, shocked at the coldness of the water, but was happy that it quenched his thirst.

He stood, shaking water from his whiskers, "We should start heading back to camp, before any WindClan cats find us. They might not want us taking water that's in their portion of the territory."

Webtail nodded, "And maybe you can catch something on our way back." Lichennose blinked, *Is she mocking me for missing the mouse earlier?* He pushed the thought away, and instead padded back toward the forest.

After a few minutes of walking, Lichennose paused, hearing a low rustle in the foliage. He perked his ears, spotting light brown feathers through a thicket. He flicked his tail for Webtail to go on, as she'd stopped as well. The silver tabby nodded and slipped away past some ferns.

Lichennose dropped into a hunting crouch, keeping his tail still, to not stir up the dead leaves underpaw. He stalked forward,

carefully sliding under a thorn bush and clamping his jaws shut to avoid whimpering as the spiky branches raked his back. The robin was pecking at the ground, hopping closer to an elm tree's roots, and momentarily glancing his way.

Lichennose froze mid-step, holding his breath. Luckily, however, the bird didn't notice him and went back to searching for worms.

The tom slowly released the breath he'd been holding, then crept closer and ducked under some dying brambles to hide. Making sure it wasn't facing him, Lichennose stepped out from under his hiding spot and closer to the unsuspecting bird, careful not to crack the leaves under his paws.

The robin's back was facing him, pecking at the ground for worms. Wriggling his haunches and narrowing his eyes, Lichennose sprang, pinning down his prey by pressing a paw on its back. The robin let out a shrill warning cry, though was cut off as he sank his teeth into the back of its throat, ending the bird's life quickly.

Lichennose picked up his catch, proud of it. A robin could feed at least one warrior, and maybe even two if shared correctly. He started to head for the big ash tree, padding past a weak furze plant and a blackberry bush before the great tree's trunk came into view. At the base, Webtail stood with an old blackbird in her jaws. There was a small patch of scooped-out dirt where it'd been buried.

Webtail nodded to his catch, eyes glittering. Lichennose gently dropped his prey, "We should head back soon." With a quick glance to the sky, he realized the sun was still rising. Webtail nodded, and the two headed back to camp.

The two soon arrived back at camp. Webtail set her prey on the freshkill-pile, Asterfoot pacing forward to greet her, the two touching noses and padding away with their tails entwined. Lichennose dropped his robin, fur fluffing out at the cold.

He purred deeply as Quailflight trotted over to him, "How'd hunting go? Also, want to share a vole? Brackenpaw caught it for me last night, and I saved it for us." she nuzzled his cheek, purring as well. Lichennose nodded, "That sounds good. Hunting was

alright, but it's cold so early in the day." His stomach growled lowly.

Quailflight smiled and twitched her stubbed tail, both cats padding over to the nursery. *I haven't been in here since my early apprenticehood,* he recalled. After his mother and father went missing, he had to kit-sit Thornkit - now Thorntail - all the time. The thought of his parents made him a little upset, but the tom shook it off.

Both cats slid into the den, Lichennose purring at the warmth and smell of milk. The sight and scents of the nursery brought back memories of the time when he and Bramblefoot were mere kits, nothing more vicious than a game of mossball ahead of them.

Sagetail and her kits were asleep in their nest. Pebblefur's were nursing, and Fennelwhisker was resting while her kits tumbled around in the moss, playing.

Quailflight and Lichennose laid down in her nest. "It's a nice den, warmer than the forest." His mate purred, "Yes, it is. And I'm glad to have the other queens with me." Quailflight then nudged him a fat vole, still plump despite being a day old.

Lichennose smiled, surprised at its size. *This'll be one of the last of the season to be this plump,* he thought. He took a bite and passed it back to her, relishing its meaty taste.

While they ate, Seedkit and Cherrykit scampered over to the mates, their brother Finchkit close behind. Quailflight perked her ears, looking at the kits, while Lichennose just watched their interaction.

"Can we *please* go play in camp? Mother won't let us leave the den!" Cherrykit complained, Seedkit's eyes wide and Finchkit smiling.

Quailflight glanced at Lichennose with an amused spark in her eyes, then back to the kits. "No, I'm afraid I can't say. If Fennelwhisker wants you in the nursery, you have to stay in the nursery." Her tone was polite, tail tip twitching back-and-forth.

The kits sighed unhappily, but Finchkit crouched and tackled Seedkit, both kits grappling in the moss. Soon, the three siblings were scampering away, chasing each other's tails playfully.

Lichennose nuzzled his mate, "Some day, our kits will be like that." A purr rumbled in Quailflight's throat, "Yep, I hope so." Lichennose took a last bite of the vole then stood, "I'm sorry, but I must be going now. I promise to visit you again before dark." He touched his nose to Quailflight's forehead in a quick act of fondness, then left the den.

His fur prickled at the chill that immediately swept over him. Stormgaze and Sorrelclaw were grooming each other by the Highledge, and the sun was peeking over the high, stony walls of camp. The sky had turned its daylight blue.

Lichennose's tail twitched back-and-forth, sitting down near the nursery and swiping his tongue over his striped flank. Before long, a voice called his name.

"Lichennose! Over here!"

The pale tabby raised his head in the direction he'd been called from. Cedarwatcher, Asterfoot, and their apprentices were standing near the apprentices' den. Lichennose hopped onto his paws and padded over.

"Yes?" he asked, tail flicking. Cedarwatcher's fur twitched along his spine, "Care to help supervise a training session with Elmpaw and Mothpaw?" The old tom's voice was still hoarse from sleep, and looking closer, Lichennose saw that his muzzle was starting to gray. "Sure." the younger tom replied, figuring he hadn't anything better to do so early in the day.

Cedarwatcher nodded, and they headed out of camp. The group padded for a few minutes before reaching the mossy hollow, a clearing not too far from the abandoned twoleg nest where apprentices trained. Upon reaching the hollow, Lichennose realized the moss was nearly invisible, with a thick layer of dead leaves covering the ground. He joined Asterfoot and Cedarwatcher at one side, their apprentices standing in the middle.

"Lichennose, you can watch - you might be getting your own apprentice soon." Asterfoot stated with a spark in his eyes. Lichennose nodded, padding over to the base of an oak tree and thinking over the fellow warrior's words. *My own apprentice?* He pondered the thought. Him and Bramblefoot had been made warriors in Greenleaf, a whole season ago. And the kits would be made apprentices soon, with the soonest being Dewkit and Birchkit. *Maybe they'll be apprenticed to us,* Lichennose smiled quietly.

"Today, we'll be practicing how to tuck in your tails while rearing up to slash at an opponent." Cedarwatcher's rugged voice dragged Lichennose from his thoughts. Mothpaw was listening intently to her mentor, while her peer only gave an ear twitch.

Asterfoot sat down next to Cedarwatcher, "Elmpaw will be trying first. Pretend Mothpaw is an enemy warrior." The tom had an edge in his tone.

"Yes." Cedarwatcher dipped his head, then added to the apprentices, "Elmpaw, try to rear onto your hind paws with your tail tucked between your legs, then slash at Mothpaw. But remember, claws sheathed." The elderly warrior sat down in the leaves, tail swishing to go around his paws.

The fur along Elmpaw's spine twitched as the two younger cats got into position. They paced around one another for a moment, then Elmpaw reared onto her hind legs in the same moment Mothpaw lashed out at her, tail going out of view as the big she-cat tried to perfect the move.

Elmpaw appeared proud for a heartbeat, but gasped as she lost balance and toppled into the leaves in an array of brown and red, sending flame-colored leaf-bits spiraling into the air.

Asterfoot twitched his tail, "Try again."

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Golden light dappled on the backs of five cats as they padded through the woods, dead leaves crinkling under their paws with every step.

Lichennose hurried to fall into step with Cedarwatcher, "Is there anything else I can help with?" Right after he asked the question, they pushed past the thorn barrier and into camp.

"No, the apprentices will be resting for tomorrow." Cedarwatcher dismissed the younger tom, tail twitching as he and Asterfoot started to the Halfrock, heads low as they chatted quietly. Their apprentices went over and laid down by their den, grooming. Lichennose glanced up at the sky, surprised to see it growing dark. The day had passed by quickly.

The pale tabby then looked over to the nursery, remembering that he'd promised to see Quailflight. He padded over to the den and ducked his head in through the entrance, his eyes traveling over the nests. Pebblefur was licking Birchkit silently while Dewkit played with a piece of moss, and Sagetail was watching her litter while they nursed. Quailflight and Fennelwhisker were nowhere to be seen.

Sagetail noticed his gaze, and commented, "Quailflight and Fennelwhisker went with Fennelwhisker's kits to hear elders' stories." The white she-cat smiled softly, eyes warm. Lichennose looked at her kits for a moment, then nodded his thanks and slipped out, heading over to the elders' den.

Lichennose paused in front of his destination. He stared at it, a cave shielded by the branches of a beech tree that'd tipped into the hollow countless seasons before. The warrior slid between the branches carefully, padding through a fern thicket and arriving in the den.

It was shady, shafts of golden light breaking in from behind him. Quailflight and Fennelwhisker spoke quietly in a corner, while Seedkit, Cherrykit, and Finchkit listened intently to Morningbelly.

Lichennose smiled at the pleasant scene, then quietly snuck around the kits, catching bits of the story. *Firestar's tale,* he recognized it immediately. That was his favorite as a kit, too. But Bramblefoot was always more interested in the stories of the Great Journey. He laid down in front of the queens, purring slightly as he and Quailflight touched noses.

"Hello, Lichennose." Fennelwhisker greeted him politely, her fluffy tail tip flicking. He nodded his head to them, "It's nice of you to come here just for the kits."

"Of course, I'd do anything for them." For a quick moment after replying, Fennelwhisker glanced over his shoulder to her three kits huddled at Morningbelly's paws. "To be honest, I couldn't stand laying around in the nursery all day, and so I joined Fennelwhisker." Quailflight admitted with a warm grin. Lichennose realized how fat her belly was getting. *She'll be kitting soon,* he noticed with a spark of excitement.

"Mm. We might get snow early this year, the prey is already growing scarce." Lichennose stated with a twitch of his ear. Fennelwhisker pushed her ears back in terror, and he remembered that this was her first Leafbare in the Clan. Quailflight soothed the long-furred she-cat with a reassuring reply, "Don't worry. Your kits will love to play in the snow."

Fennelwhisker sighed lightly, "You're right. I shouldn't be so fretful. After all, you've all survive here for countless Leafbares - how hard can it be?" a hopeful gleam showed in her eyes. Lichennose held his tongue, but recalled the harsh season he'd been through, back in his early kithood. Sure, the Clan survived through Leafbare, but it was difficult with the lack of prey and the cold.

Lichennose got to his paws, "Well, it's getting dark, I'd better be going." Quailflight also stood and licked his cheek kindly, "I guess I'd better be heading to my nest soon, too."

Fennelwhisker twitched her ear, "My kits can finish their story first."

Lichennose nodded, nuzzling his mate then leaving the den. He stood just outside the beech branches, staring up at the now-black sky. The stars and moon were blocked out by heavy clouds, leaving the hollow bleak and motionless. He scented rain. *I hope it won't last long.*

—

Long filler chapter, oh well. Anyway, the book might wrap up soon! I'm not sure, though, the climax will occur before Leafbare hits. Question, what's your guys' favorite scene so far?

• Chapter Eleven •

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather here beneath the Highledge for a Clan meeting!"

Berrystar's voice rang around camp clearly, not a single falter in his tone. Lichennose padded over to sit next to Stormgaze and Sorrelclaw. There was a light drizzle, but he ignored it, twitching his whiskers quietly.

"Mothpaw, Elmpaw, Nettlepaw. Step forward." He swished his snow-white tail and jumped down from the Highledge, coming forward a few paces to face the apprentices. They carried the scent of dried leaves as they eagerly hurried up to him, and Lichennose guessed they hadn't fully groomed all the leaf litter out of their pelts the former night.

"I, Berrystar, leader of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down upon these apprentices. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as warriors in their turn." Lichennose felt a shiver run down his spine at the ancient words. He hadn't heard them since his own warrior ceremony, back in Greenleaf.

Berrystar stepped forward to be face-to-face with Elmpaw. She puffed her fur out with excitement. "Elmpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

Elmpaw drew in a deep breath, eyes full of starry wonder, "I do."

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Elmpaw, from this moment you shall be known as Elmclaw. StarClan honors your strength and skill in battle, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ThunderClan."

Berrystar rested his milky-white muzzle on Elmclaw's forehead, and she licked his shoulder. Immediately yowls erupted from the

gathered cats, calling out the new warrior's name.

"Elmclaw! Elmclaw! Elmclaw!"

Lichennose joined in on the cheers, a grin spreading across his muzzle. Soon after, Berrystar went on with the other two, naming them Mothwhisker and Nettletail. All three cats swelled with pride, their old mentors looking on happily.

"Nettletail! Mothwhisker!" The loud yowls drown out any other sound. The gathered cats got to their paws and hurried to greet the new warriors face-to-face, welcoming them as full members of the Clan.

Lichennose smiled at the warm sight. He recalled his and Bramblefoot's warrior ceremony, the proud gleam in their mentors' eyes and the joy of their names being called out by the entire Clan.

He trotted up to Elmclaw, chuckling lightly as he realized she was nearly bouncing off her paws. "It's good to have new warriors, nobody's been named one since Greenleaf!" The pale tabby moved aside a bit as Asterfoot trotted up, touching his nose to Elmclaw's, "I'm proud of you, Elm*claw*."

After a few minutes, the cats slowly started to clear, breaking into groups and returning to their daily duties. Lichennose stayed at the three's side, though, watching Asterfoot hurry to join Webtail on a hunting patrol.

"I have some tips for your vigil tonight." Lichennose looked at the new warriors with warm eyes. Nettletail grinned, "Of course, we'll need all the advice we can get!"

Lichennose nodded, "How about we go chat in the warriors' den?" He suddenly remembered the steady patter of drizzle on his back, and realized how cold he was.

The three cats nodded, and padded with him to the den, settling down in Lichennose's nest. "Wow, it's so *big!* Much bigger than our old den!" Elmclaw exclaimed, staring around the cave wide-eyed. Nettletail looked ready to burst with excitement, and Mothwatcher

examined every corner of the den.

"The first tip of advice I can give you is to huddle together. Me and Bramblefoot didn't on our vigil, but that was in Greenleaf, when it was much warmer." Lichennose began. The three warriors snapped their attention to him, nodding.

"You also need to keep your senses alert. Perhaps stroke each others' backs with your tails every once in a while." The new warriors appeared confused, and Nettletail commented, "But what do we do if something bad happens?"

"If there is any danger, you have to make as much noise as possible, even if it means scaring everyone awake." Lichennose was surprised himself at the commanding tone in his voice. They nodded their heads, and Elmclaw asked, "When do we make our nests?"

Lichennose flicked his ear happily, "Now. That way, when your vigil's done, you can come get cozy." Nettletail, Motherwatcher, and Elmclaw nodded in agreement, beginning to scrape up moss to form their own nests. Lichennose watched them with a flicking tail, remembering that since they were new warriors, they had to sleep near the colder edges. Only older warriors, like Cedarwatcher, slept in the center.

"I'll be going now," Motherwatcher meowed when she'd finished, "I want to go hunting by myself before the vigil." She slid from the den with a single twitch of her tail. *This is their first time out of camp without agreement from someone older,* Lichennose thought.

"We'll be going to see the new WindClan border." Nettletail and Elmclaw mumbled, following Motherwatcher out. Lichennose felt a purr deep in his throat. New warriors were always a good thing, especially so late in the seasons.

Lichennose padded out of the den, flicking his ear as cold water splashed on it. The drizzle had worsened to a rain, and he heard the distant rumble of thunder. The pale tabby sighed and headed over to the elders' den, remembering that he'd heard Hollyfire complaining about thorns in her nest that morning.

The tom shivered as the rain-wet ferns brushed against his pelt, soaking down to his skin. He tried to ignore it and poked his head into the den.

Amberblaze was asleep, the other elders grooming quietly. Morningbelly raised her head and pricked her ears, "What is it?"

"I'm here to clean the thorns from the branches." Lichennose twitched water droplets from his whiskers. The elders seemed pleased with this, Hollyfire grumbling that he'd better hurry up and be quiet.

The pale warrior rolled his eyes at the grumpy elder, slipping back out and sitting back on his haunches. He felt cold drops of rain hit his head, dripping from the sodden branches. He gently glided his paws along the bark, searching for anything sharp.

He felt the jagged edge of a thorn, and pulled away before it cut his pad. Lichennose took it in his teeth and yanked it out, tossing the thorn into the thick foliage beside the den where nobody would step on it.

Suddenly, a deafening crack of lightning lit up the sky, and Lichennose nearly jumped out of his pelt in shock. Rain started to pour from the sky, forming a torrential storm in a matter of heartbeats. Surprised, Lichennose scrambled back into the den.

The elders were all sitting up with pricked ears. Aldertuft's breathing was quick and shallow, pressing up against Amberblaze. "You can stay here and wait out the storm." Morningbelly mumbled, her eyes full of unnatural fear.

Lichennose nodded and huddled against the far wall, pressing his ears back at another loud boom of thunder, seeming to shake the ground beneath him. He felt a sharp chill in his bones, an odd feeling that something bad would happen, like an unseen enemy stalking in the shadows waiting to strike. He shivered.

Morningbelly quickly stood from her nest near the front of the den and retreated to where Lichennose crouched. Her legs were stiff, and her eyes troubled.

"Have you ever seen a storm this sudden and terrible?" Lichennose asked in a low tone, as though if he spoke any louder the walls would collapse. Morningbelly shook her head, staring with wide eyes out at the torrential storm and lightning.

Lichennose recalled his chat with the new warriors, and hoped they wouldn't have to hold vigil in such bad weather.

Lichennose must've fallen asleep at some point, because the next thing he knew he was being violently woken up by a startled yowl raking through the horrible storm.

"Everyone, evacuate! Evacuate!"

It was Berrystar.

Lichennose felt the horrible feeling again in his bones, and scrambled to his paws, racing from the den. Morningbelly followed close behind, helping her fellow elders along.

Lichennose pushed through the beech branches, eyes widening at the dark camp. It must've been past moonhigh by now, but no gentle breeze stirred the trees, instead a deafening racket that he was sure would wake the entire world.

He saw Berrystar and Juniperwhisker hurriedly rounding everyone up, and shivered as rain painfully spiked against his back, thunder and lightning filling the sky.

This isn't a regular storm, Lichennose realized with terror. He was sure that, whatever this night would bring, it would change the Clans forever.

—

almost done. the climax has hit!

• Chapter Twelve •

Lichennose sped past the branches sheltering the Elders' Den, wincing sharply as a thorn stabbed into his pad. *It was dumb to put it there,* he scolded himself momentarily before running to the Nursery in search of his beloved Quailflight.

The tom pushed his body into the den, breaths rapid. He found Sagetail and Pebblefur trying to round up the kits, moving with quick, panicked movements as their litters wailed and ran around them. Sagetail glanced at him for a heartbeat, hissing, "Quailflight and Fennelwhisker left." She picked up Berrykit by his scruff, holding Firekit and Foxkit still with a paw. Pebblefur had Birchkit in her mouth and Dewkit mewling between her paws.

Lichennose grabbed Foxkit and raced from the Nursery, hearing a faint "Thank you!" as he left.

His eyes widened at the sound of breaking bark.

The pale tom dared to glance where it was coming from, seeing a tree leaning dangerously over the hollow, dangling mid-air. In its dark shadow, nearly hidden by the dark of the storm, Juniperwhisker tried to shove Aspenshade to her paws while the tortoiseshell panted on the ground.

Lichennose tore his gaze away. *I can't watch her die, but I can't help either.*

He scanned over the mass of cats gathering near the camp entrance, all scrambling in a fearful panic. Lichennose pushed his ears back at the racket of crashing branches, painfully aware the tree would fall any heartbeat now. He finally spotted Quailflight's light fur in the crowd and ran forward.

The tom passed Foxkit to Bumblebee, nuzzling his mate with heavy breaths. The warrior saw Morningbelly reach them, but glance back at the dens. He just caught her voice above the loud

rain and thunder, "I have to make sure nobody's left behind!" Before he knew it, the elder was half-running half-scrambling to the Apprentices' Den.

Lichennose gasped and ran after her. He *had* to save her. "Morningbelly, leave the dens be! You have to come with!" he hissed, managing to catch up with the surprisingly fast old she-cat. She snarled a response, "No, Lichennose! I've seen too much death in my life already, your dumber than a mouse if you think I'm just leaving innocent cats to die!"

Lichennose stumbled to a halt in front of the den as Morningbelly dove inside, melting into the darkness. He glanced back at his Clan and drew a deep breath, dipping into the Apprentices' Den.

Flypaw was huddled up in the corner, his breaths loud and shallow. Lichennose took a step forward as Morningbelly approached the younger cat, but the pale tabby looked up and saw ominous cracks in the ceiling.

"No, stop! Get out now!" Lichennose yowled, but the elder refused and grabbed at Flypaw's scruff, trying to drag the apprentice out. Too scared to think straight, Lichennose turned and fled the den. It collapsed behind him, sending a small wave of dust into the storm.

How could I let them die? Lichennose panted heavily, staring with huge eyes at the wreckage. A Clan cat protected his Clanmates, not flee and leave them to be crushed by a rockfall! However, the warrior turned and began back to his Clan, wincing at the sound of the tree crashing down the rocky walls. With a burst of speed, he made it to Quailflight.

Quailflight meowed pitifully, rubbing her cheek against him.

"We are leaving *now*. I don't care if anyone else is left, we are going!" Berrystar screeched, his white form disappearing through the bracken making camp entrance. Lichennose staggered on his paws as cats rushed around him, but he found balance and went along with, Quailflight somewhat-limping at his side.

The panicked cats of ThunderClan ran through their woods, barren

branches crashing and whining above them and leaves scattering in their wake, making the usually peaceful forest a dreadful, loud place. The Clan slipped and slid in the mud, some falling over completely but quickly being picked up by their Clanmates.

Berrystar led the group through the torrential storm, until he swerved and began to head for WindClan's portion. *Please, StarClan, let them be forgiving on such a terrible night.*

They broke past the woodland and quickly slowed, exhausted now that the threat of falling trees was gone. However, the Clan continued at a fast trot, and found WindClan huddled together, terrified, at the base of a tall hill. Patchstar stared at them with wide eyes as Berrystar led his cats to the top of the hill.

Lichennose stayed right next to his mate's sodden body, licking her ears to try and comfort her. The Clan collapsed on top of the hill, watching their beloved home, where the leafless trees were whipped by the wind like feeble twigs. Lichennose shivered. *Perhaps even a fire would've been better than this.*

Quailflight rubbed her head against her mate's cheek, breaths heavy and deep. Lichennose looked at her, asking "Are you okay?" with a shaken tone. However, his voice was nearly drown out by thunder.

Quailflight only groaned, but mumbled something about kits.

Kits? Great StarClan, not now! Not even you could be this cruel! I can't have my family be taken too, please! Lichennose leapt to his paws, horrified, "Willowwhisker!"

The medicine cat was at his side in almost an instant. Cloudpaw, however, was no where in sight. He took one glance at Quailflight and was able to guess the situation.

"Everyone, step away! She needs space." Willowwhisker muttered something about herbs to himself. *He had to leave his whole supply at camp!* Lichennose realized with a jolt of new fear.

Lichennose looked away, Quailflight's heavy breathing drown out by the storm. *Please, StarClan, spare my kits tonight...*

He headed over to Bramblefoot, nuzzling his brother. Bramblefoot wrapped his tail around Lichennose, the brothers sitting close together as they watched Quailflight have her kits. It seemed like they'd waited for endless seasons before Willowwhisker stepped away.

At Quailflight's side lay three tiny, defenseless kits, suckling desperately at her belly. She smiled a weak grin, her stubby tail twitching.

Willowwhisker whispered something to her, but Lichennose didn't catch the exact words through the pounding rain and thunder. He ran forward and covered Quailflight's face in licks, settling down beside her and nuzzling his mate. He recalled the day back in Greenleaf when he asked to be her kits' father, realizing just how good of a choice that had been.

Bramblefoot slowly approached, his purr hardly noticeable in the storm. "What shall you name them?" He asked gingerly, tail swishing as he sat down.

"How about we name the light brown tabby Squirrelkit?" Quailflight looked up at Lichennose. He nodded joyfully, "That's a wonderful name. And how about Branchkit for the brown tabby?"

Quailflight nuzzled her mate, "Yes, perfect. And for the final kit... Hazelkit." All three cats stared down at the kits, warmth filling their eyes. Lichennose had never wanted them to be born on such a bad night, but at least they could be safe from falling trees. He winced at the thought of Aspenshade.

He nuzzled Quailflight, but flinched when a huge strike of lightning lit up the sky. He raised his head and gazed back at the forest, closing his eyes slightly as he remembered the recent deaths. Morningbelly, Aspenshade, Flypaw... None of them deserved to lose their lives today.

Lichennose then looked up at the pitch-black sky, rain pelting his face. He mentally asked why StarClan had to claim so many innocent cats today, but then looked around at his family. They were all still here with him, and he was so lucky that Quailflight's

birth was successful. But he couldn't help feel guilty, that he could've done something else to help his three dead Clanmates survive. And what would they do now, with that fallen tree? It was huge, it must've covered at least part of camp. "Bramblefoot, can you watch Quailflight?" The words slipped out before he knew it.

The darker tabby nodded, turning to look at Lichennose's mate and kits. Lichennose turned and looked for Berrystar; the snow-white leader was sitting a few fox-lengths away, his conversation with Juniperwhisker silent from the thunderstorm.

Lichennose padded over, and as he approached, it was clear Juniperwhisker was telling him about Aspenshade. Berrystar's eyes were sorrowful, and he sighed to himself. "May I speak with you?" Lichennose asked sheepishly.

Berrystar turned to him and nodded, his deputy padding off. "Yes, Lichennose? What is it?" The white tom's gaze seemed distant, his words so quiet and gentle that Lichennose had to strain to understand him. The pale tabby blinked, "Where will we go now?"

The leader dipped his head, looking utterly hopeless. "I don't know."

Lichennose whimpered. He turned and hurried back to his family, laying down next to Quailflight and swiping his tail across their kits' backs, trying to wipe the wet from them. Unfortunately, as soon as his tail slid off, they were soaked again from the rain. He sighed and closed his eyes, dipping into uneasy slumber.

Mountains rose steeply from the earth a long way away, and behind a waterfall, there was a dim cave full of blurry cats. Booming overhead, there was a deep voice.

"Beware, for the thunder has enough power to destroy all the Clans."

Cats were fighting, battling against dark shapes of odd warriors, Lichennose's adult kits among them with bodies covered in wounds and claws dripping with blood. Screeches and yowls blocked any other sound, the wails of cats being struck down filling the air. With

a terribly loud crash of lightning louder than any of the screams, Lichennose jolted awake.

Lichennose jumped to his paws, shaking from his nose to tail tip, quickly looking at his kits and mate and relaxing just a little when he saw they were safe and asleep. He glanced around, realizing all his Clanmates were sleeping. All except for Berrystar, who was sitting and staring at their territory.

Lichennose staggered over to him, still shaken by the dream. He sat beside the leader, pressing his ears back as rain hit them. The storm had lightened only a little, and thunder still rumbled in the clouds.

Berrystar glanced at him, and the pale warrior confessed everything about the dream, from the tall cliffs to the voice to the battle that felt so horribly real. Berrystar was clearly astonished.

"Tomorrow is the full moon. If we can get to the Gathering, perhaps you can tell Willowwhisker and talk with the other medicine cats." the white tom twitched his tail tip. Lichennose was somewhat shocked that Berrystar immediately believed the dream, but then remembered that he must be terrified at the storm and sudden deaths, and that maybe the dream was all they had to know StarClan still was on their side.

Lichennose nodded and stood, turning to go find Willowwhisker, the fur along his striped spine prickling. He spotted the matted tom and paused for a moment, then hurried up to him, realizing this may be the fate of the Clans.

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There it is! The final chapter! Book 2 shall be out soon enough!

I'm really happy to know that so many people love this story, it's an amazing feeling to see the votes and comments you guys leave. If you guys haven't figured out yet (there was a few hints!) who the real father to Quailflight's litter is, it's... oh come on, you didn 't think I was going to tell you, did you?

Anyway, I'll ask two more questions; Who was your favorite character, and what was your favorite scene?

With that, I'll see you all in book 2!

~ Warrior

UPDATE

Do not fear! Book 2 is on it's way. I recently got a new phone, so I'm still sifting through my notes to try and gather everything, so for now the series is put on hiatus. But I am still continuing it!

I have named book 2 Trailing Shadows. I will definitely be posting here when Trailing Shadows is out!

~ Warrior

BOOK2

[image]

at last, book2 of fate of the clans is out!

it's titled "trailing shadows", and the wonderful cover was made by hakunacrown (thank you again hakuna!)